**Digital Health Modernization Discovery Research – Meg’s notes**

December 2020

**P3A - 1pm - 12-8-2020**

Initials: PR

Tuesday, December 8, 1:00pm – 2:00pm

Veteran

Male

White or Caucasian

35-44

OEF (Iraq/Afghanistan era) – Rural

Some college (no degree)

Marine Corps

PA

OEF (Iraq/Afghanistan era) – Rural

\*Device:\*

This participant was on an iPad.

### Background

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

\* Almost 39 yrs old

\* Using VA HC since ~2007

\* Recently transitioned to shots instead of meds for bipolar schizophrenia.

\* Moved to country in Elwood recently.

\* Son, wife, 2 cats, dog

\* Likes camping, hunting, outdoors, driving

2. \*When did you leave the military?\*

Right after Afghani thing - 2002-2003.

3. \*What VA benefits do you receive?\*

Disability - 100%. Certain amount of money a month. Was 70% before but now gets 100% bc not able to work. If works, wd go back to 70%.

Uses VA med ctr in Butler. Wd go to Pitt for emergencies.

4. \*Do you have any family members who you claim as dependents?\*

Yes, on disability check. Claims both.

4.a. \*Do your family members receive any benefits from the VA?\*

Yes ^

5. \*Do you manage any of your VA benefits online?\*

Sometimes uses “My Vet” thing to check appts and see if msgs from docs.

Went on few weeks ago to order water pillow for sleeping (neck). Gave to wife.

5.a. \*Where do you do that? (Moderator can share screen and show MHV or VA.gov if participant seems unsure of website/account).\*

“My Vet.”

6. \*Do you use any mobile apps to manage your health?\*

No. Does not have Apple phone.

VA app - Just the “My Vet” thing - and sometimes the one where you can check all your ratings.

6.a. (If yes) \*What apps do you use? What do you use them for?\*

Verified by screen share that he uses MHV and VA.gov.

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## Mental model of health at the VA

1. \*How did you learn about the health care available to you through the VA, and what was the process of applying for and accessing those benefits?\* (In follow up, confirm if participant used any online tools or resources.)

2007 - started gg to Highland Dr - gg to groups for my mental illness.

Not sure how I got eligible. Pursued VA HC when out of military to get meds. “And that worked out great.”

\*Did you work with anyone at VA?\*

Counselor from VA named Louise.

\*Process of applying for HC?\*

Pretty long. Had to wait couple yrs to get it approved.

\*Process bt HC and disability?\*

Think that took couple yrs, too. Got back check of couple thousand dollars.

Get SSDI from Social Security as well.

\*Applied for HC or disability online?\*

Thinks he did.

2. \*Tell me about the health care you receive through the VA.\*

Dr. Gurkliss was his doc when moved here. He gave him residents to work with. Annoying, wanted perm doc. Transferred from Pitt to Butler bc wanted perm doc. Natalie Durich. Psychiatrist is Dr Goodrich. “They’re both awesome.”

Sees perm doc every 1-2 yrs.

Gets shots thru VA.

\*How learn you wd have consistent doc at Butler?\*

Think my mom told me this. She is a Vet as well. Butler VA is smaller, have “permanent doctors” there.

2.a. (If they have dependents) \*How do you manage your dependent’s health care?\*

CHIP (?) program - canceled this when money was tight. Now she goes thru welfare, United HC. Her insurance is pretty good. Meds pretty cheap. 1h drive.

3. \*Do you use any medical providers outside the VA for any of your health care needs?\*

No. His wife does ^

3.a. (If yes) \*Tell me a bit about the experience of using private and VA health care.\*

Hers is more private - small doc ofc (~5 docs). VA is lot bigger, lot more docs (couple hundred). Hers is more convenient. Mine is, too, bc it’s not that far.

Sometimes inconvenient bc I go there and my meds are not ready. So I have to go back next day.

Also had issues with meds for son thru wife’s insurance. Prescription taking too long.

3.b. \*Do you manage your private health care/insurance online?\*

She manages online. Her info is more in depth.

Not sure if MHV shows add’l info (from his wife’s insurance).

4. \*Since you first became a Veteran, has there been a change in the types of VA benefits you’ve received?\*

Have the benes you’ve rec’d changed.

Changed his shot to a cheaper shot. Guess VA is always trying to go cheaper.

\*Process for chgg disability rating:\*

Called number in Cleveland. They made file of it. Regional ofc in Pitt gave him the number for Cleveland.

4.a. (If yes) \*What was the reason behind those changes?\*

See ^

5. \*How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?\*

Usually the rating they give you at VA that rates how disabled you are wrt working, driving, being able to function.

6. \*In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?\*

“Yeah, I think there is.”

“With HC and disability, it coincides bc without the disability, you wdn’t have the HC.”

7. \*When it comes to your health care, what is the most important thing you need from the VA\*?

I guess my shots. Get them once a month. Without those, I’d be cuckoo.

\*How do you manage getting the shots monthly?\*

Go to VA. Check in at kiosk. Take urine test for drugs every month. Go to waiting room. Get shot and they write me a note.

Sometimes I call to find out when my appt is.

## Tasks

\* \*How would you reach out to your VA care team if you had a question?\*

Wd prob call the nurse’s hotline. Usually Google VA Butler, call, go thru prompts, leave msg with one of the providers. They usually call back pretty promptly.

Went online…

(Used type-ahead with Google.)

Google > Typed va butler phone number

Sometimes uses MHV for monthly appts. It is on another iPad that the VA gave him for his appts.

1. Google > typed my health e vet

2. Sign in with DS Logon

3. Error

4. Forgot username flow

5. Error

6. Forgot password flow, which includes security ?s

7. Sign in (form field keeps making “P” in Peter a capital letter)

He uses Safari on other iPad.

8. MHV homepage

9. Get Care

10. Appointments (missed this in notes sent to Em)

11. Care Givers — usually tells me my provider names

12. Treatment Facilities

\* \*How would you refill a prescription you have with the VA?\*

1. Google > typed butler va pharmacy

2. Butler VA HC System page - saw pharmacy number

3. Over the phone, type in the medication I need.

\* (If applicable) \*How would you go about checking the date of an upcoming medical exam you have for a disability claim?\* (Note: this may have been a long time ago.)

1. Google > (had to think about what to type) typed va regional office phone number (800) — this is Cleveland Regional Ofc.

To get appt for wife or son:

1. Google

2. Wife’s doc’s name

3. Call

No copay for wife’s doc.

\* \*How would you request reimbursement from the VA for traveling to your health care appointments?\*

Yes, goes to kiosk at the VA, where you go to check into appt. Kiosk has “check into appt,” “request travel.” “It’s nice. Convenient.” B4 had to go to your appt first, then request travel pay, then form sent to bank.

One in Pitt is another ofc in same bldg.

\* \*How would you update the dependents on your VA benefits?\*

Call VA regional ofc in Pitt, think it’s the 17th floor.

\* \*How would you make updates to your health care benefits?\*

Probably call my doc and tell them.

## Branding and trust

1. \*How would you describe My HealtheVet to a fellow Veteran?\* (Note if they mention MHV coordinators, newsletter or articles — something outside the patient portal).

Pretty self explanatory. You can go to benefits. It will give you list of what you want to check on.

He clicked over to VA.gov homepage. Was not sure what happened for a second. Likes categories, easy to read. “Self explanatory.” Easy to find stuff, breaks it down.

2. \*What about “VA health care”?\*

Docs are pretty nice. “They have your back. They kind of look after you — pretty much care for you.” I just didn’t like the part where every year I get a new resident, then I have to explain my life history again to them every year.

3. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?\*

“About a 5.”

3.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

(He is on VA.gov hp.)

It’s easy to use. Pretty self-explanatory. “I find it very useful.” Check claim appeal status - breaks it down. Payment history. Things like that.

4. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?\*

5 - “it’s confidential.” Pretty confident - mentioned password.

4.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

Not really. I don’t know.

5. \*If you have a question about your MHV account or something isn’t working, what do you do?\*

Good question. Prob write a letter to regional ofc, saying I am having probs with MHV, hopefully they can help me fix it. I wd give my number - hopefully they wd reach out to me.

6. \*Have you ever been in touch with a My HealtheVet Coordinator?\*

A job coach? I had someone helping me look for a job once thru VA. When I was looking for job b4 I was 100% disabled. They came to house, talked to you, helped you fill out application at the job if you needed them to.

7. \*How does My HealtheVet compare with other online health tools you’ve used?\*

“It’s pretty easy. …You just type in what you need to know and it will pretty much give you your answer.”

From VA.gov hp, directed him to the tab with MHV (first tab in browser — he did not see, so directed him to My Health link on VA.gov top nav).

### My HealtheVet patient portal (15 minutes)

Let’s take a look at My HealtheVet together.

Moderator will ask participant to share screen if not already, or show logged in My HealtheVet account. \*(5 minutes)\*

1. \*What do you use this website for the most?\*

To keep track of appts, med, docs. Lab tests. Have gout. Wd look to see results. I don’t look at refill prescriptions or medication list — I know what med I have.

Went to meds list — refill prescription. Noted that his prescription changed.

Has never used “Track delivery” button.

2. \*What do you find the most valuable on this website?\*

For DD214 and award letter stating disability. These are most imp things on here (in personal info section). Imp in case I’d ever need it to give to somebody.

3. \*What do you wish this website did that it doesn’t do right now?\*

“Talk back to you.” If you had a ? and needed help.

4. \*Outside of this website, are there other places you go to manage your VA health care?\*

This site (MHV) and when I go to VA I get the pieces of paper telling when next appt is. Then I put on my calendar.

5. \*When it comes to your My HealtheVet account, can you think of a time when you needed to give access to a family member or someone else?\*

Actually when VA was helping to fix catalytic converter in my car, I needed to come on here to get my disability rating. They also needed my DD214. I had to print it out and send it back to them. A program at VA helped me with my car. “They spotted me $600, which was pretty cool.”

\*Do you know of any other Veterans we cd talk to?\*

Maybe my friend Mark.

**P8A - 3pm - 12-9-2020**

Initials: LL

Wednesday, December 9, 3:00pm – 4:00pm

Veteran, Veteran’s family member, Veteran’s caretaker

Female

Asian

Associate’s degree / trade certificate / vocational training

Navy

TX

Gulf War era – Urban

### Background

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

2.

Was Navy corp man, Albuquerque, MN.

Works at call center for Navy Med Clinics.

2. \*When did you leave the military?\*

June 2000.

3. \*What VA benefits do you receive?\*

Just HC. “I don’t have any percentage.” “Like the disability percentage.”

Used VA loan for house and used up GI Bill (2008).

4.a. \*Do your family members receive any benefits from the VA?\*

1 daughter who’s 7 yrs old. Does not claim as dep on VA HC.

5. \*Do you manage any of your VA benefits online?\*

Yes.

5.a. \*Where do you do that? (Moderator can share screen and show MHV or VA.gov if participant seems unsure of website/account).\*

Uses “the portal… MHV.”

Uses pay.gov to pay for prescription.

6. \*Do you use any mobile apps to manage your health?\*

No.

6.a. (If yes) \*What apps do you use? What do you use them for?\*

Was excited to use apps to manage health. Saw ads, thinks on MHV around summertime. Was disappointed. “It just wasn’t opening the pages, or something like that.”

> Tried to use VA LaunchPad, VA RX Refill.

\* Hoped to use LaunchPad to comm with care team. It was just easier to go on MHV. Was buffering, wd not open. Seemed to be still in test phase.

\* RX Refill was doing the same thing. Buffering, not opening the page.

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## Mental model of health at the VA

“I do everything on my phone.”

> Referred to MHV as “the portal.” Has folder on phone with passwords and links saved.

> \*Compose message\* (went from MHV hp?).

> Uses messages “all the time.” Easier than being on hold. “I try to avoid calling as much as possible. I just don’t have that time in my day.”

> \*Prescription:\*

> Selected prescription option in SM.

> \*Appts:\*

> MHV hp > View my appts in center of page.

> \*Paying bill - pay.gov:\*

> Letter just mailed to house.

> “It just wants me to pay some balance that I have no idea what it is.” Expect me to know from a letter.

> “I wish that one wd lead to the other. That wd be easier.” Link on MHV to tk me to pay.gov and log me in. Uses different login for pay.gov.

> Only other way to find out about bill owed to VA is to call billing.

> While on pay.gov, asked where go to pay a bill?

> Looked in account section of VA’s pay.gov.

> “If I lost the letter, I’d be completely lost here bc I don’t have an account number.” Keeps letter on desk so as not to lose it. Looking at letter - there is no acct number. Can pay online www.pay.gov, in person, or on phone. Letter has no account number. “That doesn’t make any sense.”

> “Then I wd have to end up calling and who knows how long I’d have to be on hold to tk care of this.” There are 4 phone numbers on the paper. Wd use the phone number next to 4 options and how to pay.

[image:7C191566-31FC-4799-8F63-F57112EBB15D-91306-0003AD38B315F7D1/Screen Shot 2020-12-09 at 3.35.15 PM.png]

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## Mental model of health at the VA

1. \*How did you learn about the health care available to you through the VA, and what was the process of applying for and accessing those benefits?\* (In follow up, confirm if participant used any online tools or resources.)

Was in San Antonio orig, did not know benes were avail to me. Had no injuries to claim. Went into ofc, simple process. Went to Audie Murphy VA.

Was not working when went in to apply.

\*Why think no benes avail?\*

> Worked in military clinic for 8 yrs, contractor b4 that. Paid for HC for 16 yrs. Thought Vets had to have disability to get HC.

3. \*Do you use any medical providers outside the VA for any of your health care needs?\*

No (for med).

Dental and vision - yes. Uses VA for eyes.

\*Diff bt mgg VA and non-VA HC?\*

“I kind of know what I need and how to get it.”

3.a. (If yes) \*Tell me a bit about the experience of using private and VA health care.\*

3.b. \*Do you manage your private health care/insurance online?\*

No.

4. \*Since you first became a Veteran, has there been a change in the types of VA benefits you’ve received?\*

Only used VA since 2016. “I haven’t seen much change.”

Used VA home loan in 2009. Also “a pretty easy process.” Realtor helped. Did not go online.

VASH - housing assistance thru VA. Had this in 2016. Worked with Marcus (?), think in 1 of the VA clinics.

“Everything that I’ve used through the VA… It’s really easy. They try to eliminate the stress.”

“I didn’t have to lift a finger, really, I just had to show up and sign papers.”

> “I wish when I’d gotten out of the military that my active duty station wd have told me… I went over a decade not knowing.”

5. \*How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?\*

“Like a compensation (?) of anything they wd have had doc as part of any med visits.”

> Think I wd qualify for something but it would be long paper trail, too much time.

> Wd take too long, be too hard to “get that fresh load of papers” to the right ppl.

> I did start the process in San Antonio. But not sure what happened — they were supposed to check the papers. “They said they’ll do it, and they didn’t do it. So I don’t und that.”

6. \*In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?\*

Yes. Seems like lot of ppl not being truthful with getting disability. Dated Vet recently and he stated he was not able to walk, but outside the VA, he did.

“I think HC across the board there is a std that’s supposed to be followed nationwide.”

“I’m sure there is a std as to what kind of care is supposed to be followed.”

\*If you had disability, do you think wd affect HC?\*

No.

7. \*When it comes to your health care, what is the most important thing you need from the VA\*?

“Proper communication. And timely communication.”

> When getting an RX refill, turnaround time. I try to stick to the time frames. But it has to go thru so many hands.

> \*You feel you have to proactively check to make sure things getting done?\*

> Yes. It’s the personal responsibility of HC providers.

## Tasks

See compose message, appts, pay bill, and prescription refill above.

\* \*How would you pay a VA health care bill, such as a copay?\*

Related to pay.gov above.

\* \*How would you request reimbursement from the VA for traveling to your health care appointments?\*

Take form to the travel dept.

\* \*How would you update the dependents on your VA benefits?\*

Tk birth certificate or something into the office.

\* \*How would you make updates to your health care benefits?\*

Not sure what’s chgg.

### Branding and trust

1. \*How would you describe My HealtheVet to a fellow Veteran?\* (Note if they mention MHV coordinators, newsletter or articles — something outside the patient portal).

“I wd say it’s pretty user friendly, easy to nav.”

Easy to nav means…

Little blue blocks (Pharmacy, Appts, etc) that “pretty much categorize every need that you wd request from the VA.”

2. \*What about “VA health care”?\*

> “There’s a lot of hurry up and waiting.”

> She worked in VA for about 3 mos. So many patients that there were long waiting times. Ppl waited hours.

> Has not really experienced this herself…

> I don’t get seen a lot bc not a lot of health issues. Schedules appts early or last in day.

3. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?\*

5 bc of “layout, user-friendliness, the design”

3.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

> Make it better: Link to pay.gov. And if linked, hopefully the account info wd be “pre-loaded (name, and so on)”.

4. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?\*

5 now.

4.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

When everyone was still gg into clinic or pharmacies, seemed like it was backed up. Now with COVID, seems like things are running as they always should have.

I have used the portal since day 1.

Response time for getting replies from msgs is better since COVID.

Info on MHV is accurate and updated. Is secure.

5. \*If you have a question about your MHV account or something isn’t working, what do you do?\*

Go to contact-mhv page.

6. \*Have you ever been in touch with a My HealtheVet Coordinator?\*

No.

7. \*How does My HealtheVet compare with other online health tools you’ve used?\*

> Only thing is the link to the payment. My daughter uses another health system, and it links up so it makes sense. And the info crosses over. Her app is called “Healthy Life.” Uses it for prescriptions, ?s, health record.

> She looked but did not see link to pay.gov on MHV hp. Looked under Pharmacy nav dropdown, too.

## My HealtheVet patient portal

1. \*What do you use this website for the most?\*

Previous labs, when seen last so I can make followup appt, sending msgs to provider if needing anything.

2. \*What do you find the most valuable on this website?\*

Direct link to providers (messaging).

3. \*What do you wish this website did that it doesn’t do right now?\*

No.

4. \*Outside of this website, are there other places you go to manage your VA health care?\*

No.

5. \*When it comes to your My HealtheVet account, can you think of a time when you needed to give access to a family member or someone else?\*

Never had to.

## My HealtheVet patient portal

7. \*Get Care\*

\* \*Have you used any of the pages under “Get Care?”\*

Treatment Facils - to locate where clinics are and where located, if there are branch clinics. Looked when moved from Albuquerque.

Get Care dropdown:

Went to Treatment Facils > Treatment Locs

> Expected to put in ZIP code.

Went to Appts from Get Care dropdown.

“I only used those 4 blocks. I guess this takes me to the same place.” ^ Referring to hp main categs.

8. \*Track Health\*

Went to healtheliving- assessment - wd not use this.

Went to the assessment, found she had done it in 2018. “I don’t know why I did it. I guess I was just bored.” Feels like anytime you do something like this, it will tell you you’re not doing that great.

> When she tried to go back to MHV by clicking “back,” landed on VA.gov hp. Was confused. Knew the VA.gov hp was the “main VA.”

9. \*Research Health\*

\* \*Have you used any of the pages under “Research Health?”\*

“I wouldn’t feel the need to go into this at all. I mean, unless it advertised financial compensation… Let’s do a research study.”

\* \*What do you think these pages would be used for? / How did you use the pages here?\*

\* \*Would you find this valuable? / Did you find this valuable?\*

10. \*MHV Community\*

\* \*Have you used any of the pages under “MHV Community” (Ask if they subscribe to the MHV newsletter)\*

“This looks familiar.”

Clicked on “All mobile apps,” scrolled thru. Clicked on ForeSee model to make it go away.

Subscribe link - would this be valuable for you?

> “I wd feel like if I added my email address, I wd just get a lot of spam.” Prob ask me to download the apps, maybe. I guess - general health things that wd prob come out weekly.

**P9A - 9am - 12-10-2020**

Initials: CP

Thursday, December 10 9:00am – 10:00am

Veteran

Male

White or Caucasian

55-64

Bachelor’s degree

Air Force, Army

NE

Gulf War era – Urban

During intro, he asked if we are talking about health care, “not the VBA side.”

Dubbed him “the Navigator.”

### Background

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

Army 1977-1985

Air Force 1988-1992

Did nothing with VA, then in 2013 my co closed, so I was without job. I’m in IT, have bachelor’s. Friend told me to go to VA for help. The friend said he went there all the time, that they take care of him.

2013 - Less than 2 mos to get 1st appt. “Best experience ever with the medical profession. They were just wonderful.” Took lot of history, got pneumonia vaccine.

Was using employer HC 1992-2013. Was not aware of VA HC.

Got job thru LinkedIn. Headhunter came and interviewed him. Hired him on the spot. Worked as contract employee for 6 mos, then got hired full time.

Problem with elbow and shoulder. Doc said he was perfect candidate for shoulder replacement. Went back for checkup next year.

> Nurse told him he cd not have health insurance with VA anymore bc he had job. He was paying copay. Nurse told him to apply for disability and then he cd come back.

> He got charged for med appts. Was disappointed.

Omaha VA had treated him well. Shoulder got worse. Got 30% disability. Found out cd add family bc he was in for 30 yrs (?), applied for more. Thinks he added family in 2017. Wife, his oldest daughter is special needs (36 yrs old, has had disability since a baby). Other daughter just grad college and got married.

July 2019 full shoulder replacement. Some issues now. He is 61 yrs old. Put in for more disability. In process now.

Once he was more than 60% disability, he did not have to pay copays.

Docs rotate out every yr or 2. Gen they are med students.

Cholesterol issues. They put him on statins (med, spelling?).

Last May had annual checkup over Zoom.

“I feel blessed to be a Veteran and to be part of the VA health system. They seem to really care about me.”

5. \*Do you manage any of your VA benefits online?\*

Yes. “I do everything online.”

> Douglas County VA - felt they were not very well informed, so he went online to do things. “eBenefits makes it easy to do things.”

> He was denied when tried to keep disabled daughter online. Was “disheartening.”

Also uses VA.gov. “Those 2 are kind of interconnected.” Seems they are moving things from eBenes to VA.gov. VA.gov - request for higher level review for appeal - does not show up (on eBenes or VA.gov?).

Used “My Health Vet.” That one is really good. Refill prescriptions. Allows me to communicate.

> I am in the red clinic. When he sends secure message, it goes to wrong doc. But she takes care of him anyway.

Sent msg about prescription that was expired.

Downloaded records, history, checked bloodwork after checkups.

“I like My Health Vet. It’s pretty good.”

He grew up in Alexandria. Misses it.

6. \*Do you use any mobile apps to manage your health?\*

No. Likes “the big screen of a computer.” Likes size convenience of computer.

He has health insurance thru company. Wife is on that. Daughter who is disabled has Medicare thru state of NE and gets SSI disability. When he added her to his VA disability, his disability check was reduced. That payment is connected to Soc Sec. But he gets more money (net gain) after adding daughter.

\*Experience of diff HC systems?\*

VA basic checkup - charge $500 to his private health insurance. Private insurance pays the VA $360. His insurance costs $200.

Daughter had 7 cavities last yr. Paid $500 to dentist last year.

Daughter - not managing Medicaid online. She has card. Whatever gets billed gets paid.

Wife has flex account. United HC.

Daughter who just got married had emergency appendectomy 11 days before wedding.

Managing everything online with wife. He uses VA for all HC. VA bills private health insurance.

Had to pay $1100 out of $21K for daughter. ~$3K was allowed.

Call doc to make appt.

Uses United HC website. Told story of getting 2 bills and only had to pay one.

Does not use providers outside VA except dental. Forgot to get eye exam. Gets extra benefit bc over 50.

## Mental model of health at the VA

5. \*How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?\*

Your disability rating is when you put in for a disability and you have an exam and they agree u have a disability, there’s a %. You have a schedule and an overall rating. Table on eBenes and VA.gov. He has 90% rating, is working to get 100%. If you add all numbers together, get 140%. But there is a math formula.

Gets benefits and disability pay.

“My main benefit that I see is the HC.” I’m sure I have other benes I cd get but don’t know about.

Looking at retirement in next 5-10 yrs. Needs to research survivor benefit for his wife.

Know there are education benes. I don’t any of that applies to me or my fam at this point.

“A disability check is a real blessing to anybody, I think.”

6. \*In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?\*

“There definitely is bc of the way the VA rates ppl. Anybody can apply for HC, but the rating you have determines what group you are in. … Those groups, they all qualify for diff types of HC. Not HC itself, but what you end up paying, what you get, and things like that.”

\*Priority groups:\*

https://www.va.gov/health-care/eligibility/priority-groups/

When I retire, I’ll still have HC. We will have to get HC for my wife.

7. \*When it comes to your health care, what is the most important thing you need from the VA\*?

“They’re absolutely wonderful in doing those things.” Docs ask how you are doing, do you feel safe? “It’s much more personal, and I feel like they really care about my health and welfare… I feel really good about that, and that’s why I keep going.”

## Tasks

\* \*How would you reach out to your VA care team if you had a question?\*

Either call or send msg on “My Health Vet.” I don’t like emails or being on hold.

If I call, I’ll either talk to someone within a couple mins, or they’ll call me back within an hour.

So if it’s something I need in next day or so, I will call. For prescriptions, will send msg thru MHV.

\* \*How would you refill a prescription you have with the VA?\*

Had MHV in favorites on browser. Uses computer (not phone or tablet).

\*Why choose MHV login over other sign-in options?\*

Stepped away to get password. Knew username.

Saved password. Has new computer, so didn’t have passwords.

Went to msgg from hp > Compose Msg > Showed in dropdown for “to” field that his new provider is not there.

Next wd pick whether has gen question or needs prescription. Showed previous msg about prescription.

Refill?

Pharmacy dropdown at top nav > Refill > Click on prescription > Submit refill button at bottom. Always uses this way to refill prescripts.

Used track delivery button?

> Yes. Kind of frust. It does not offer track delivery for all prescripts. He asked them to fix this and they did not.

>

For a specific prescription, went thru tracking number to USPS.com site.

Almost always prescripts are individually packaged.

\* (If applicable) \*How would you go about checking the date of an upcoming medical exam you have for a disability claim?\* (Note: this may have been a long time ago.)

\*If you were applying for disability, how check exam date?\*

“Are we talking about a C&P exam?” I’ve had a couple of them. Have done a few apps. In the beg, he wd get phone call and a letter. Wd call if sched issues. Had to go to Lincoln, NE for hearing exam.

In the past couple yrs, seems like the med exam cos (LHI, something EQ… 3 cos) — the 3 cos have called him initially, sent email with link to create account at website. Site has allowed him to fill out a DBQ (disability benes ?aire) — it is the doc the examiner submits to VBA to consider my claim.

Examiner looks for things that correlate to his getting a rating (per the statute).

DBQ is exactly correlated to the statutes that cover Vets’ disability. Shoulder - end of replacement auth get 30% for dominant shoulder and 20% for other shoulder. There is a check-in at end of year… He described in detail how ratings work and when they are assigned and what ratings he has.

They rated his pain.

? in the ?aire:

Does the Veteran have moderate or severe pain or weakness in shoulder?

He has severe weakness but moderate pain.

His left hand, which is his dominant hand — it’s hard to do anything like hammer bc of weakness in shoulder.

> Examiner asked him the question wrong, and he didn’t catch it. It is 2 things combined into 1 question. So he is trying to appeal this now.

Showed us the bookmark for UHC, his personal HC (United HC).

\* \*How would you pay a VA health care bill, such as a copay?\*

Have paid copays, and I think (paused)… I know I paid one by going to window in VA hospital. Can’t remember how paid the others. If I had opp’y to pay it online, I wd have.

\*How describe MHV?\*

“The 4 big boxes”

Monitor and sched appts, review tests — he went thru links in 4 boxes.

“I think it’s a good resource to monitor your HC and comm with your health provider.”

Use eBenes and VA.gov more for my benes info. (Referring to MHV) I read thru some stuff in the healthy living thing. That was good. Quit smoking. Think there is good info and resources in there if u want to read thru them.

## Branding and trust

1. \*How would you describe My HealtheVet to a fellow Veteran?\* (Note if they mention MHV coordinators, newsletter or articles — something outside the patient portal).

3. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?\*

4

3.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

Only bc I can’t communicate with my current provider.

4. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?\*

5 - “I trust it completely.”

4.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

“It seems to be secure, it seems like it’s just me, and it has a lot of sensitive information in it that I may or may not want everybody in the world to know about.” Good to get ?s answered, resources.

5. \*If you have a question about your MHV account or something isn’t working, what do you do?\*

Password issue. (Think he said he cd not resolve via the site.) I was in the VA hospital in Omaha. Ofc there where they help ppl with things like this.

6. \*Have you ever been in touch with a My HealtheVet Coordinator?\*

Not unless it was the person who helped me sign up for this acct the 1st time at VA hospital. He was walking by and said he’d like to do it, showed his card, and the person helped him sign up.

7. \*How does My HealtheVet compare with other online health tools you’ve used?\*

“This one is actually really good bc it communicates with my providers.” We use the Methodist HC system here in Omaha for my family. They have a thing similar to this but it’s not as comprehensive.

Noticed that it’s “My Health -e- Vet.” Asked if it’s always been that. Was surprised.

Anything you wish this website did that it doesn’t now?

On United HC site, it shows bill submitted, cost, allowed amount, cost, my responsibility. This site doesn’t show dollar amounts. Maybe that is not part of this system.

Went to Compose Msg and saw selection for bills in dropdown. It doesn’t show my old bill.

“It’d be nice to know what they’re billing for things.”

Had total shoulder replacement and they never billed my insurance company. So I never found out what that cost.

**P11A - 1pm - 12-10-2020**

Initials: MM

Thursday, December 10, 1:00pm – 2:00pm

Veteran

Male

White or Caucasian

25-34

Bachelor’s degree

Marines

VA

OEF (Iraq/Afghanistan era)/service ended less than 3 years ago

### Background

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

Marines 11 yrs.

Reservist for last 2.5 yrs after that.

Working for BAH at Air Force Base

Wife, son (baby) — claim as deps.

100% disabled - PTSD (70%)

Sleep apnea (50%)

Nerve pain

Back issues

Anti depressants, anti-anxiety.

3. \*What VA benefits do you receive?\*

Disability payment. Mental health services.

4.a. \*Do your family members receive any benefits from the VA?\*

Disability payment has increased bc I have a wife and son but I am not claiming any specific benes for them.

Use VA counseling svcs, is going to use marriage counseling soon.

Used home loan program to buy a home. 2013, 2019, then refi last month.

Don’t use VA HC for everything. Keep TriCare Reserve Select - lets him go to anyone in town, does not have to wait for an appt to open up at VA.

Only use VA for mental health services.

5. \*Do you manage any of your VA benefits online?\*

Uses eBenefits.

5.a. \*Where do you do that? (Moderator can share screen and show MHV or VA.gov if participant seems unsure of website/account).\*

eBenefits.

6.a. (If yes) \*What apps do you use? What do you use them for?\*

Uses VA Video Connect on laptop, web-based. Has used the app to connect via telehealth. (He looked thru email to verify this.)

Uses it only for a call, never needed to transfer files or anything.

\*Diff bt web app and mobile app?\*

Think web app worked a bit better, smoother. Does not have super clear memory of it but remember not as smooth.

TriCare West HealthNet Fed Svcs - does not use online. Premiums deducted auto, gets paper bills thru mail. Once in a while will pull down referral letter.

HealthNet Fed Svcs has portal. Gets letters there and sometimes looks for in versus out of network providers.

MHV - “Looks familiar.”

\* rarely get msgs

\* occas uses Pharmacy tab to get meds, which are put in when convos with psychiatrist.

Showed VA.gov -

“I will go to that website, and it usually ends up kicking me to another website anyway.”

### Mental model of health at the VA

1. \*How did you learn about the health care available to you through the VA, and what was the process of applying for and accessing those benefits?\* (In follow up, confirm if participant used any online tools or resources.)

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity (MCIA) - has civilian employees that used to be Vets. They told him to contact the VSO on base, which was great. Helped a lot. “I tried doing it on my own initially, and it was a goat rope.”

Did my claim and got all exams scheduled b4 I got out of military. Had a reading within 4-5 mos of being discharged. Was retroactive.

Things he needed for exam: things like affidavits for mental health related issues.

Hard for average lay person to figure out which forms to fill out and what to provide. Average person wd have the forms kicked back to him 3-4 times. With VSO, good to go.

2. \*Tell me about the health care you receive through the VA.\*

“Ups and downs. Mental health svcs have been pretty solid.”

> “Took a hot second” to get hooked up with mental health provider. Partly my fault, partly VA’s. I was still seeing a provider (thru TriCare) — and that confused the process.

> The pain mgmt part has been frustrating. See private providers bc of this. I und the reticence when it comes to pain mgmt providers prescribing opiates bc of the opiate epidemic. I have been on pain meds for years. “A 30-pill bottle (of Percocet) lasts me a year.” I only take them when in extreme pain. I had been on that level of medication for a while. When transitioning to VA and letting them know that I only had 2 pills left, “they just flat-out refused.” I have been hospitalized bc of flare-ups.

> “Take the time to learn my background, to learn my case history, whatever.” Was talking to a relatively junior doc and both he and his supervisor refused. Since then, he has gone private for pain mgmt. “It was just very, very poor patient management.”

\*Response from VA patient mgmt team was we don’t know you? Talk more about this.\*

> He said the VA doesn’t have a long history with you so we don’t know what you have been taking, what your injuries are and how you’ve been treating them for years. Based on what we see, we don’t think providing you with an opiate is what we want to do. He asked them to help him figure out a way to get to the yes. The provider said no way we can help.

> This ^ happened during a phone call. And the provider kept putting him on hold and going to talk to the attending.

> \*Was this a records issue?\*

> I am pretty sure I pushed my records over to the VA (from TriCare).

“I actually have a very poor short-term memory.”

4. \*Since you first became a Veteran, has there been a change in the types of VA benefits you’ve received?\*

I have used a variety of benefits: Home loans, psychology and psychiatry, pain mgmt, primary care provider (do physical as req’d), CPAP, hearing aid.

CPAP and hearing aid provided by VA.

5. \*How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?\*

I think most Vets and transitioning svc members are familiar with the term. Means “% disabled.”

What does this mean or allow you to do?

Affects monthly financial comp, fed hiring benes you can be afforded (dep on level), and the amount and type of HC the VA will give. Dep on whether conditions are svc-connected.

6. \*In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?\*

“Yes, absolutely. The things the VA has rated me as disabled for, they will provide HC.”

> P&T - “permanent and total.” Means the VA cannot chg your rating for the rest of your life. If you don’t have a P&T rating, which can only come with 100%, then every yr the VA evaluates you to see if your conditions chg. Also affects certain education benefits. CA colleges (UC system or Cal State System) - if you are 100% P&T, your kids can attend free.

7. \*When it comes to your health care, what is the most important thing you need from the VA\*?

“Mental health svcs. … For me, my psychologist is an individual who was in the military himself and works very reg with the Vets, so he can relate very well…”

My psychiatrist has been working with Vets for years so has good und of what meds and challenges go with our particular situations.

“MH svcs are by far the most imp svcs” I get from the VA.

Audiology and sleep apnea are not Veteran-specific.

## Tasks

\* \*How would you reach out to your VA care team if you had a question?\*

“I wd go to VA.gov and sign in and nav to… No, sorry, I wd go to MHV and just use the secure comm server thingamajigger.”

1. Went to MHV

2. Signed in with MHV credential - uses this when on my computer bc my pwds are here. Also use DS Logon. Rarely ever use ID.me. Why wd I use DS Logon if I have the MHV option.

3. Clicked Compose Msg from MHV hp box.

\* \*How would you refill a prescription you have with the VA?\*

1. MHV hp (went back to it)

2. Clicked in box - refill prescript

3. Selected prescript and submitted

Has prescriptions shipped to house. Otherwise, especially for MH prescripts wd have to drive 1h to Long Beach to pick up.

Doesn’t think he used track prescripts. “I want to say no.”

\* (If applicable) \*How would you go about checking the date of an upcoming medical exam you have for a disability claim?\* (Note: this may have been a long time ago.)

1. Back to MHV hp

2. View my VA appts

MHV - “It has everything you need, for the most point, right up front.”

Wd look in same place for disability exam as for med appts.

\* (If applicable) \*Or a private provider (dentist, optometrist) outside the VA?\*

As soon as mk those appts, he puts in calendar or phone. They text him a reminder.

\* \*How would you pay a VA health care bill, such as a copay?\*

No.

\* \*How would you request reimbursement from the VA for traveling to your health care appointments?\*

“I don’t think I’ve ever actually requested reimbursement.” When I was having appts for disability rating, they auto did that for me. I wd get $2 or $3 check here or there.

\* \*How would you update the dependents on your VA benefits?\*

Wd go back to eBenes.

1. Clicked sign in page

2. DS Logon - there is an option for CACC as well. “This is why I don’t like using the DS Logon…” I have to pick on this screen (that has many logos on it) “which website I was trying to log onto in the first place.”

3. Picked Dependents within Profile.

## Branding and trust

1. \*How would you describe My HealtheVet to a fellow Veteran?\* (Note if they mention MHV coordinators, newsletter or articles — something outside the patient portal).

“Your 1-stop shop for everything HC related, once you have your disabilty rating.”

He got signed out of eBenes. Has all his passwords saved.

MHV does not have much to do with applying for disability comp and tracking it. Most ppl want to know how to apply and where your claim is all the way thru, and that’s gg to be on eBenes.

Once you have all your HC, you manage it on MHV.

“It really is a great 1-stop shop.”

Has clicked on Benefits link under Resources b4.

Has “decent connection” to Vet comm’y — BAH is 30% Veterans. (He read the “Community” link as that kind of comm’y.)

\*How wd you describe VA HC?\*

Ppl need to have realistic expectations as to what it can and cannot provide and realistic expectations wrt time. One of my Marines was having internal pain for years, took the VA 4 yrs to realize she needed a hysterectomy. And VA sent her eczema cream when she told them she does not have eczema.

He has had friends who’ve had great experiences and others with horror stories

“The level of care that you get will be largely dep on your local assets and resources.”

“Go in with low expectations and be pleasantly surprised.”

I have worked for the fed govt for years and understand the landscape.

3. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?\*

“I’d say 4 1/2-5…

3.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

The landing page has everything you need right there on it. And even the fact that there is an option to log right into MHV and not have to do DS Logon.”

It has “95+% of anything that I wd need to know about my VA HC.”

4. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?\*

4

4.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

Glitches happen and human error happens. Sometimes you never know which. I have had comm issues, computer glitches. Sometimes it’s bc provider didn’t see my msg.

Some of my stuff is missing from MHV but I don’t think it’s MHV’s fault - think the problem is at a higher federal level.

My info is “as secure as possible on an unclassified frickin’ govt server.”

5. \*If you have a question about your MHV account or something isn’t working, what do you do?\*

Wd click contact link at bottom of MHV homepage. Wd check FAQ and Help and User Guides 1st.

6. \*Have you ever been in touch with a My HealtheVet Coordinator?\*

No.

7. \*How does My HealtheVet compare with other online health tools you’ve used?\*

It’s better than TriCare’s, which is “funkier.”

MHV…

“It’s all that I cd ask for of a landing page.”

> Wd add a tool to search whether providers are in or out of network.

### My HealtheVet patient portal

2. \*What do you find the most valuable on this website?\*

Probably prescription refills and being able to easily access my own med records.

Prescription refills are what I use most often, every day.

Med records - Still fighting with VA to get my TBI (traumatic brain injury) classified as being svc connected. Want to make sure I can get it svc connected “in case things go really sideways for me at some point in the future.”

**P12-A, 3pm - 12-10-2020**

Initials: EH

Thursday, December 10, 3:00pm – 4:00pm

Veteran

Male

Black or African American, White or Caucasian

35-44

Some college (no degree)

Army

CT

OEF (Iraq/Afghanistan era) – Urban

He is using MS Surface tablet.

### Background (5 minutes)

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

Lives in Norwich, CT

Army Nat’l Gd 9 yrs

Last 3 yrs on state active duty

Base in Groton, CT

Lives with girlfriend and her daughter

Materials handler

2. \*When did you leave the military?\*

Left military in 2011

3. \*What VA benefits do you receive?\*

Just VA HC

Has not used VA housing benes. CT had 1st time homebuyers program was a bit better than VA so he used that program.

Has not used educ benes. DD214 - state active duty is bit diff than fed active duty.

Has filed disability claim. Is in process. Currently receives disability.

5. \*Do you manage any of your VA benefits online?\*

Some stuff. If need to get hold of doc real quick. Tells symptoms. Gets multivitamins thru VA. Give prescription a day or 2 and they will renew it.

The VA one, I call it “the normal one” - MHV, I guess it’s called.

Now does not have doc in town. Ppl on sub base are flooding town docs now. All HC is VA for now.

Wants a doc outside of VA. Goes to New London VA now. Thinks they are closed and will prob refer him out to 2 hospitals, which are farther out.

Claims:

\* 1st one was thru advocate, who submitted it and gave him a copy

\* 2nd one did online - used MHV, same site I use for secure msgg

6. \*Do you use any mobile apps to manage your health?\*

No, I try not to keep lot of apps on phone. I work for govt, that got hacked into. “I’ve got more ID theft programs to last me forever.” So I try to keep apps and things like that to a minimum.

### Mental model of health at the VA

1. \*How did you learn about the health care available to you through the VA, and what was the process of applying for and accessing those benefits?\* (In follow up, confirm if participant used any online tools or resources.)

Coffee chitchat - got on topic of health issues. Encouraged to try the VA. All they cd do was say no.

He thought you wd have to have gone overseas. I did all my time stateside. Talked to other Vets who also did all time stateside and they encouraged him to try the VA.

He does not want other Vets to think he’s scamming the VA.

To get disability - approved about Oct 2015.

“C&P something” where they physically see what is gg on.

10% for bunion on foot

Certain % for tinnitus

Certain % for rabies or bumps

Got 20% overall but still can get seen for the things he got 0% for.

If you get 10% or 20%, you can get seen for pretty much anything. Under a certain %, you only can get seen for just that issue.

2. \*Tell me about the health care you receive through the VA.\*

“It’s OK.” (Laughs.) Feels like I”m in basic training where they get you in and get you out. “It just seems rushed.” To me, they (docs) are under a lot of stress to get many patients in and out.

3. \*Do you use any medical providers outside the VA for any of your health care needs?\*

“Home grown doctor” is what he wants. Bc of that feeling ^

It’s not on everything, but I und they are under stress and lot of patient load, but I wd rather have 2 docs, one in my hometown where I can get seen quickly — rather than dealing with a whole bunch of other ppl with lot gg on.

Not using other insurance - no one is seeing new patients. And COVID adds a whole nother layer.

I don’t qualify for a lot of the fed benes. There is a code on my DD214. I just learned my benes were gg to expire last year - cd have used that.

To learn about benes -

Just browse on MHV. Can find out about discounts and programs. Ppl to answer ?s. I do a lot of Google searching.

5. \*How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?\*

“I work at the Navy sub-base.” A lot of the guys are months away from getting discharged. Tell the guys to see the doc now for any issues so it’s in your medical file. See the doc on everything — need it in your file. Then when you get out, you need to file a claim. If it happened on active duty it’s imp to document. “Once you’re done, you leave.”

30% is kind of your ultimate goal. Compared to resume, getting a job. “Your rating will determine what kind of other benes… at least if you can get your benefits started now,” it’s an advantage.

“It’s a legal advantage.”

6. \*In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?\*

“Yeah, I guess the more disability you have, the more HC you can get.” You have to look out for yourself. Overall this is your health.

7. \*When it comes to your health care, what is the most important thing you need from the VA\*?

“Understanding, suggestions, maybe put themselves in my shoes... Take the extra time to ask the extra ? When you say you’re gg to do a followup, [do it].”

Only time my doc calls is to say I have an appt or I forgot something.

Now I’d like to ask you how you manage information and tasks related to your health care. For each one, talk me through the steps you’d take. If there is something that you go online to complete, I may ask you to share your screen so I can see what you would do. \*(10 minutes)\*

\*Tasks\* Moderator should prompt about device usage if participant mentions digital tools or resources.

\* \*How would you reach out to your VA care team if you had a question?\*

I’d go on the website MHV and send a secure msg. Doc or nurse or care team wd get the msg. Commented that they are getting a new doc (referring to the “to” field — might say doc’s name). My doc wd reach out to me.

I don’t have website “saved.” I don’t go on at home as much versus at work.

1. MHV homepage

2. Signed in using ID.me (used CACC card on work computer). ID.me has good deals on products like Under Armour. Not just Veterans. Emails with 15-20% off of products for ppl working in HC.

3. MHV home

4. In box on hp - Compose msg

5. Was in inbox. Had trouble finding “compose” button, which was upper left, above left nav.

6. Hit compose button.

7. Dropdown with dept or certain doc. Nurse or someone wd see the msg 1st. Maybe give doc a heads-up. Last yr talked to nurse, who told him nurses get the msg b4 doc. Doc does read msg to mk sure nothing missed.

\* \*How would you refill a prescription you have with the VA?\*

1. Top nav Pharm > Refill prescipts in dropdown

2. Wd put check mark next to prescription. Wait about a week. Within day or so, they will have msg off to side “VA prescription tracking” or thru USPS I wd get a tracking number. Get sep email from USPS. He knows if coming from West Haven, CT it’s a prescription.

\* (If applicable) \*How would you go about checking the date of an upcoming medical exam you have for a disability claim?\* (Note: this may have been a long time ago.)

Just had one couple weeks ago. QTC is 3rd party. VA outsourced bc overwhelmed with COVID, he said. Took couple months bc it goes by where you live and how far you want to travel. For me, closest was MA, then another one in NY. He went to MA. “You’re stuck in the middle.” Don’t want to wait. Just go to closest one.

QTC sends email and calls you. He prefers email. QTC wants verbal confirmation. He has tinnitus. Likes to do everything in writing so there is proof.

When they do the verbal confirmation, few mins later they send you an email to register. You sign in and there is all your info you need to go to appt. Location, doc. Week of appt they send you a packet with all the same info. You list all the problems with your hand. Fill out ?aire. Always comes in FedEx packet.

He wd not expect to see the date of the C&P exam on MHV anywhere bc it’s a 3rd party. That is also why it can take a few weeks to get results.

\* \*How would you pay a VA health care bill, such as a copay?\*

Bill comes in mail. Go to website with VA or federal…

Type client ID and it already knows how much you owe + it asks you if you want to pay another amount. Use credit card.

\* \*How would you request reimbursement from the VA for traveling to your health care appointments?\*

They are picky — has to be related to your disability.

When you go to appt, there is kiosk to check in for appt, it asks you how you traveled to appt. Later on, couple weeks later you either get a check or a letter saying claim has been denied.

Think you can do it on MHV (did not seem sure).

## Branding and trust

1. \*How would you describe My HealtheVet to a fellow Veteran?\* (Note if they mention MHV coordinators, newsletter or articles — something outside the patient portal).

“Complicated easy. It’s very easy to use but it’s very complicated at the same time bc your ? May not fit into one of these categories (referring to boxes on hp).” Also hard to figure out who to talk to or call if you need to.

MHV is his “go-to, pretty much for everything.”

If you call the 888 number or whatever they will get you thru.

2. \*What about “VA health care”?\*

“It’s tough. I wd say it’s worth the time but don’t get easily frust.” You have to consider they are overworked, poss underpaid. You need to be patient bc if something happens to you while in the military, this is your 1st step.

Really appreciate the new thing they have done (something “1st”) where you can put your info in. Referred to needing Tylenol, not bugging your doc.

3. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?\*

4 - for the purposes I need it. Sure there are ways to improve it. “I only use it for a few things.”

“It’s a good, solid 4.”

3.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

\*What wd make it a 5?\*

Maybe some of the trackable stuff, maybe you can chat with someone online. Ex ?s: Why can’t I get educ benes? Or other type live chat issues.

Referred to live crisis line. Maybe want to have a live chat. Especially now, talking on phone, it might take you an hour to get thru. And if they hang up on you, you wd have to go thru the process again.

4. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?\*

2 - bc I am still waiting for my appts to transfer over. (Think he is referring to

\*Where look for doc notes?\*

Track health or Health history (didn’t see it here)

Maybe go to Labs and tests. Referred to Blue button for downloading all info.

\*Where look for resources?\*

MHV community - “dep on what your’e looking for, it’s that chain reaction.”

That’s where I fd out you can get dental at reas cost but it ends next year.

\*Go to subscribe user MHV Comm’y.\*

Thinks he’s subscribed. “I do see this a lot.” VA started newsletter. That’s how I found out abt ID.me, just reading email and clicking on diff stuff.

### My HealtheVet patient portal

1. \*What do you use this website for the most?\*

\* To send note to doc about appt

\* Ty to mk appts

\* Refill prescription

2. \*What do you find the most valuable on this website?\*

“To me, all of those things (referring to the above) are at my fingertips. It saves me from calling.”

3. \*What do you wish this website did that it doesn’t do right now?\*

Prob the live chat where they can chat about whatever and get direct line if need to chat further. Or video chat.

\*Showed him VA.gov.\*

VA.gov: “That sounds familiar.”

He got confused when it went thru auto sign in since he came from MHV.

He has this page and MHV bookmarked.

“At home, I just do the Google search for MHV and go from there.”

Used VA.gov for submitting claim, und the process.

\*Have friends who are Veterans we can talk to?\*

He loves doing research sessions. Good way to vent but not vent. Thinks we are ppl from 3rd party. Mentioned Shannon by name and made a comment that made it sound like he has participated in research studies before. Also said you get paid to be in a study.

**P2B - 11am - 12-11-2020**

Initials: RP

Friday, December 11, 11:00am - 12:00pm

Veteran

Male

White or Caucasian

65 - 74

Master’s degree

Air Force

MD

healthcare and disability – Rural

Uses iPad.

Nicknamed him “A la Carte”

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

1968 active duty started

Retired 1993

Healthy when retired.

> Transfer of records “didn’t go very well.

> Began contact with VA to get hearing aids.

2011 - diagnosed with prostate cancer. Didn’t pay attn to VA. Using Walter Reed Hospital.

> ~2017 - heard prostate cancer was presumptive case for having been in Vietnam. Applied to VA for disability. Rejected bc DD214 didn’t show he was in Vietnam. Happ with my older brother, too.

TDY - temp duty.

Older bro there 1960s - Vietnam. I was there in 1969.

He appealed the rejection and showed the proof of being in Vietnam. Won the appeal and got disability.

13 presumptive illnesses - if u were in Vietnam for even 1 day. Agent Orange.

2. \*When did you leave the military?\*

1993.

3. \*What VA benefits do you receive?\*

Hearing aids, eyeglasses.

Also receiving DIC (dep indemnity comp) bc of my late wife who was retired from Air Force.

No housing or education benes used.

\*Using VA for primary HC?\*

“No, it’s just much easier to use Medicare and go to local facils.”

4. \*Do you have any family members who you claim as dependents?\*

My wife.

4.a. \*Do your family members receive any benefits from the VA?\*

No.

5. \*Do you manage any of your VA benefits online?\*

“Hmm… Um, I can’t think of any. I have had a video call from a GP in the VA. I guess once a yr he contacts me. And I have gotten some lab tests as a result so that essentially my annual wellness test is completed.”

With COVID, Ft. Meade is not doing anything in person.

\*How receive lab tests?\*

Been a while. In 2019 went and saw the doc at Ft. Meade. Took blood tests there. Don’t remember.

VA contacts me every yr, checks to see if I still have prostate cancer. Think it’s a contractor. He goes to VA to have meeting and have a PSA test.

PSA - Prostate Specific Antigen

\*Why does VA contact you every yr?\*

They are giving me substantial amount of money, and I’m quite confident they don’t want to give it out if it’s not due.

“Watchful Waiting” program - score, monitoring prostate. If I were to be cured, there wd be no reason for me to receive the DIC from the VA. He has lowest score possible.

Every yr they check score to see if chgd - “I understand that.”

6. \*Do you use any mobile apps to manage your health?\*

Yes. “Every doc seems to have a diff mobile app that’s associated with their records.”

6.a. (If yes) \*What apps do you use? What do you use them for?\*

App called “My Chart” - Medicaid (think she means Medicare)

\*Showing VA.gov, then MHV:\*

Recognized both. “My Health.” Think I opened my records so they cd be shared bt VA and my local docs.

### Mental model of health at the VA (20 minutes)

Now I’d like to hear about your experience transitioning from the military to the VA. \*(10 minutes)\*

1. \*How did you learn about the health care available to you through the VA, and what was the process of applying for and accessing those benefits?\* (In follow up, confirm if participant used any online tools or resources.)

Found out about VA svcs:

Monthly luncheons - someone mentioned you cd get glasses.

“Once you start with the VA, then you can get more and more med benes.”

> The retirement records did not transfer well. But I had my own Air Force records saying my hearing had deteriorated when I was in svc. I used those to prove to VA.

2. \*Tell me about the health care you receive through the VA.\*

Started hearing aids 2005. Had a set of “civilian” hearing aids before.

Hard to remember, wd have to go back and research.

Wife: 2011 - When we found out about your prostate cancer, we went to Walter Reed and we found out you were entitled to VA svcs.

Re: applying for HC - “It was probably done on paper.”

\*Re: once u r in VA, you can get more things:\*

I now get postcards from VA reminding me of things like getting flu shots. I can show my VA health card and get a flu shot at a drugstore.

In this COVID time period, the folks at Ft. Meade have not kept me informed.

I was getting postcards saying I need to send appt for eyes and ears. I called, and they said no, we are not doing appts. The postcards are sent auto.

5. \*How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?\*

Is familiar with the term. “I don’t have a table in front of me, but they seem to have a disability rating for every possible injury.”

Think rating for hearing is 10%.

Disability can be additive so if you have finger missing and lameness in leg, you get 10% for one and 15% for another which gives you 25%. And you get disability income.

6. \*In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?\*

“I think that you have to have some little disability before you can get health care. If you’ve had no disability at all, I don’t think you can get health care thru the VA system.”

\*Re: retiring and being a Vet and not paying attn but not paying attention to VA?\*

Being healthy and coming out of military, “I didn’t want to be a drag on the country. … I didn’t see a need for any kind of support from VA.”

Was married to another officer at the time. She retired 5 yrs later. We were financially well off.

We didn’t see VA svcs as necessary. “It was for ppl who were less fortunate.”

7. \*When it comes to your health care, what is the most important thing you need from the VA\*?

(Paused) “So far, other than the DIC that I get from the VA, all I’ve really gotten that has been useful has been glasses and hearing aids.”

\*Anything you need from VA to mk an easy process?\*

(Laughing) “I just need to know when they’re taking appts.”

## Tasks

\* \*Re: your eyeglass appts, how would you reach out to your VA care team if you had a question?\*

I cd go to MHV and see if I can set up an appt. If that didn’t yield, anything, I cd call Ft. Meade.

Bc of my hearing problems, I gravitate towards using the Internet over the telephone.

On iPad, he did not know what the “home screen” was.

\*Check VA appointments\*

Health apps folder > Launchpad > Manage my health > He is on a 404 page (veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov) > Find VA locs (will tell me how to get to Ft Meade)

Back on veteran.mobilehealth.va.gov > I am lkg for MHV > Wd just go online to MHV

Tried gg to MHV - myhealth.va.gov - requested URL was rejected

Google…

Typed ehealth - did not work

Typed myehealth > got myehealth vet (think he did auto complete)

Clicked VA appts under MHV stuff on Google.

Signed in with MHV. Said either MHV or CACC method wd work. “I have all those methods.”

Landed on View my VA appts.

Looking at appts list…

Reading thru eye and audiology appts. “FM PAT TELE TEAM 6” is clinic name. Sees cancelled appt.

Pretty good record of my appts.

\*If had a question for VA docs…\*

I have the phone number of the assigned GP for me.

Here at bottom of appt list says I cd schedule an appt > Clicked button.

\* Reading schedule or cancel page…

\* I can do all 3 of these sign-in options.

\* This is kind of telling me now that I’m here that I have to sign out and sign back in. This is kind of awkward.

\* So I log out.

\* Clicks Sign in button.

\* Used MHV sign in.

\* Went back to schedule or cancel page - “It looks like I”m in a loop now.”

\* Clicked link to VA.gov.

\* Read the page on VA. gov - “See now, I’m getting confused bc I’ve signed in twice already.”

\*If clicked the green button, what would happen?\*

“It wd give me the opp’y to sign in 1 more time.”

\* On sign-in modal for VA.gov.

\* Selected MHV sign in option.

\* “I mean this is my 3rd time now.”

\* Used MHV sign in.

\* “Ok, now, complete my sign in. This is something new. Now it’s gg to send a code to my phone if I press the continue button.”

\* Entered code VA.gov texted to his phone.

\* Screen said “You are now returning to VA.gov.”

\* The progress circle kept spinning, took about a minute and changed modes of spinning.

\* He landed on the page on VA.gov page for sched, viewing, canceling appts.

\* Clicked thru to VAOS (modal showed).

\* Went into VAOS flow for choosing type of appt. Chose optometry.

\* Find locations screen. Chose Baltimore.

\* Chose 3 dates.

\* Chose reason for appt > routine. Entered as reason: My eyesight is changing. Entered best time to call.

\* Reviewed details.

\* Requested appt.

\* “Now I assume someone is going to call me and tell me what fits their schedule.”

### Branding and trust (5 minutes)

3. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?\*

4

3.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

“The fact that I had to sign in 3 times to get to the process I was really looking for.” Aggravating.

4. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?\*

5

I know they are working hard to make the system work. I appreciate that. I think I’ve been on more than 1 of these surveys (research sessions).

\*What do you do most on MHV?\*

Lab test results - useful for annual PSA tests (VA). Does testing for PSA 2x a year thru urologist and Watchful Waiting program.

\*What is the most important thing about MHV?\*

“The fact that I can look up my records is probably most imp. If something chgs, I want to go back and find out what my record was showing prior to the chg.”

**P3B - 1pm - 12-11-2020**

Initials: WH

Friday, December 11, 1:00pm - 2:00pm

Veteran

Male

White or Caucasian

55 - 64

Master’s degree

Marine Corps

MD

Healthcare, disability, pension - rural

He gets health care thru TriCare.

Background (5 minutes)

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

Retired Marine

Served 26 yrs

2. \*When did you leave the military?\*

Retired in 2008 from the Reserves

Bc it’s a reserve retirement, retirement pay does not start till [missed this]

Getting retirement pay since April.

3. \*What VA benefits do you receive?\*

VA home loan in 1993.

Was helping his dad with VA HC. Helped set up appts. By advocating on his behalf, learned about VA HC system.

I am in the lowest level of elig. Don’t think I am elig for any VA HC.

4. \*Do you have any family members who you claim as dependents?\*

4.a. \*Do your family members receive any benefits from the VA?\*

Not sure what you mean by “dependent.” I am def a sponsor or any kind of military benes.

5. \*Do you manage any of your VA benefits online?\*

Other than VA home loan, no. Worked with vendor to get VA home loan elig certificate, or elig reinstated. Think they are just a banking institution. That was last time I did any mgmt of VA benes.

When he was helping his dad, he signed him up for that MHV (pronounced it as we do). He did it so his dad cd manage prescripts and appts.

\*How found out about MHV?\*

Maybe a poster in VAMC when taking his dad to an appt. Advertising or mktg maters.

/Previously he said…/

Recall gg online to apply for HC, was streamlined process. Final decision was that I was not elig or I was in the lowest of the elig group. This was close to Marine Corps retirement in 2008.

Have had health insurance thru my employer for past 27 yrs. Until next Friday.

As a military retiree, I will have TriCare start after next Friday when I retire.

\*Do you manage your non-VA HC online?\*

Have an HSA thru his employer, pay it monthly. Have BC/BS high end plan. Manage it all thru HSA account. Debit card linked to HSA account. Pay bills, acct balance.

HC acct has a portal where can see prescripts, doc notes. That is where my primary care physician is. It’s a civilian account.

\*How do you like the experience of that online portal?\*

[ missed some of this ]

Easier than talking on phone. Easy to follow up. Mentioned he had ruptured disc.

\*How learn about VA HC or benes?\*

Researching online. “I’m a researcher like yourself.” Where I work, we do qual and quant studies.

I am aware of Veterans programs. Have only taken advantage of VA home loan.

5.a. \*Where do you do that? (Moderator can share screen and show MHV or VA.gov if participant seems unsure of website/account).\*

6. \*Do you use any mobile apps to manage your health?\*

No, not really.

[ missed some of this ]

Uses PC or laptop. I do a lot of primary banking on an app. Have apps that track weather and exercise and games. No apps from HC perspective.

\*Process to enroll in retirement pay?\*

I knew about the DFAS website, was tracking my pay when I retired and went into that gray area status.

I became elig at 60 for military page, was able to go into DFAS again. Was notified of retirement pay.

HR for Marine Corps retirement in Quantico. They notified him b4 he became 60. Got hard copy notifications about retirement. Got military ID.

Got a packet from VA explaining the general benes that may be elig for me as a retiree. Probably have that somewhere but we are living bt homes now. Wd be hard to find. Recall things like “voc rehab,” educational assistance, home loan, GI Bill.

Nice for them to send out those comms but I wd go online to research.

I was on phone with VBA this morning re: the new VA Solid Start Program. Seems like tremendous benefit. They have counselors calling Vets after separation to see if the Vets have ?s.

\*If you got those calls, do you think u wd have done things diff?\*

I am pretty fortunate do don’t really need those benes, other than home loans. Wd have used the Montgomery GI Bill.

\*What are you thinking in terms of not needing things from the VA?\*

GI Bill, vocational rehab, job assistance. I am not in a situation where I wd need to tk advantage of those. I think of those programs as more for the younger Veterans who have only spent 5 or 6 yrs in. But as an officer and having spent 25 yrs in, I don’t really need those programs.

DFAS - get paid thru this. They send me an email every month, just a couple days b4 my pay hits my checking account. I just monitor it, make sure the correct amount hits my bank. I was in there recently to update my address and email. “It’s helpful, and it works.”

\*Does anything stand out for you wrt the diffs bt the things you did for your dad on MHV and your experience with civilian HC?\*

Not all his prescripts and appts were in there. I didn’t get into the details at the time bc I was not his primary caregiver. My aunt, his sister, helped manage his care. I was curious when signing up for MHV but didn’t really use it a lot after the initial sign up.

\*Showing MHV homepage:\*

Yes, looks familiar. Was gg thru bookmarks on browser to see if I needed to update my emails. I poked around on this site a bit.

“Very clean website. I’m impressed. I know VA has done a lot of work” trying to help Vets.

He went thru the 4 boxes on homepage, felt he understood the info there.

He just set up initial acct for his dad, one login.

\*Showing VA.gov:\*

“I can’t say I have seen that before.”

“It’s just not ringing a bell, and it’s not something I recall.”

There are a lot of sites out there for Vets, incl VSOs. I belong to the American Legion, too. Have website acct.

### Mental model of health at the VA

Now I’d like to hear about your experience transitioning from the military to the VA.

2. \*How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?\*

I have a brother in law who has a disability rating and receives some kind of payment.

The process requires that that Vet that is seeking that disability payment get an exam and adjudication process. Rating goes from 10% to 100% at 10% intervals. Based on that rating, don’t know if it’s tied to your rank in the svc, but it leads to a monthly payment for that disability.

There are certain thresholds required for receiving a pension. 30, 80, and 100% - those thresholds seem to be tied at a rating for pensions.

Those who are 100% disabled also qualify for add’l VA benes. Think they get more svcs and their monthly payment is prob higher.

Lot of VSO programs tied their benes to disability rating at VA.

Program for nat’l parks - tied to Purple Heart or disability rating to get into parks free.

\*How tied to rank?\*

In active duty, allowances for housing and other things tied to rank. Don’t know how disability rating works.

6. \*In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?\*

Obviously, I wd think there are prob other progs and svcs elig to a disabled Veteran.

Has not applied for disability. Has no illness or injury that wd be a disability.

### Branding and trust (5 minutes)

1. \*How would you describe My HealtheVet to a fellow Veteran?\* (Note if they mention MHV coordinators, newsletter or articles — something outside the patient portal).

“I wd tell them it’s an online personal acct that wd allow the Vet to manage their HC and wd track things such as appts, any prescribed meds and prescriptions, as well as any notes back, doc’s appts.” Helpful to have it all in 1 place.

The “big discriminator” is that not everyone has computer, especially older ppl. I wd assume younger Vets wd have computer, be inclined to use online resources.

3. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?\*

4 or 5

3.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

My use was very limited, but based on the areas it covered, info it was tracking, I’d say a 4 or a 5. Not sure it has everything there I’d need as a patient. “But it looks extremely helpful.”

4. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?\*

4

4.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

Say 4 just bc “it’s only as good as the information that’s being fed into it.” I have had this experience with my civilian account.

Think it wd be great resource a long as the info is accurate and complete. “It’s just a matter of completeness.”

\*Wd you log in and show us your civilian HC portal?\*

Google was on his computer. Has MyChart bookmark tab. Novant Health is his HC system.

He signed in.

Showed us top nav: visits, msgs, test results, meds.

Under tests, showed us MRI, X-ray of hip. Shows test, ordered by, result.

Showed medication list. They entered aspirin prescription for him. Looks like they removed past prescripts. “This is dynamic… it’s my current snapshot of what I take as prescripts.” Remembers past prescripts being in the list.

Discussed whether he could enter his own meds. He didn’t know.

Visits - helpful for me to remember past history like doc visits, labs, MRI, radiology visit. Click on link to get result of the visit. Useful that I can see the tech’s interp of the X-ray or MRI, then goes to doc to help with the interp.

Messages - can send msg to anyone in my care team within that practice.

Other providers put notes into MRI, etc.

Expect to see HC bill on this portal?

I get hard copy bills and emails saying I have an amount due. Looked at the screen on MyChart, said it was tied to the emails he gets.

Thinks bc this is his primary care ofc, his bills come thru MyChart.

When he gets a paper bill, he pays the bill to Novant thru his HSA BC|BS portal. They save provider accounts in the BC|BS portal so he can select them later.

The test results and visits are most valuable. Like that it is chronological bc it maintains the history. Also uses spreadsheet to track.

Have only used msgs to care team a couple time, but it is “extremely convenient.” They might reply back the next day.

\*Meds just shows current ones - do you ever want a hist list of meds?\*

“It may be in here, but it doesn’t look it.” Think it wd be extremely helpful to see hist of meds as well, as long as it’s clear which meds are past ones. “I think that wd just help manage, especially if somebody is helping to manage care for an older Veteran.”

Need to know meds when talking to physicians, to help docs make decisions.

Anything missing in the MyChart portal or that you wish it would do.

“I think it’s pretty comprehensive.” Found this extremely helpful when I was gg thru my back problems a couple months ago. It’s “well laid out.” But “you gotta feed the beast” — needs to have complete, accurate info.

If info is missing, “you lose trust in a portal like this.”

**P4b - 3pm - 12-11-2020**

Initials: KL

Friday, December 11, 3:00pm - 4:00pm

Veteran

Female

White or Caucasian

45 - 54

Some college (no degree)

Army

CO

healthcare and disability – Urban

“VeryK” was her screen name.

She is 55 years old.

Glad when she saw the opp’y for this session.

“I’ve had a hell of a time with the VA.”

Background (5 minutes)

To get started, I’d like to get a little background information about you, and your experience with the VA.

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

In Denver. Moved from Mich.

Army 25 yrs.

Never had any problems with VA until more recently I have more extensive, expensive work I need to get done. They are ignoring my calls.

I have a bad hip. Got German Shepherd to help keep her mobile. Does not want to take pain pills. Feels like the VA wants to just keep her “hyped up on pain pills and not fix me.”

Has grandkids.

Writing memoir about her time overseas. Kept journal, etc of 17-month tour. Iraq, Kuwait. We were stationed in “a pretty safe spot” in Kuwait. But still pretty scary. Lot of 3rd world nationals.

I was only woman overseas and left-handed. Ppl think you are evil if u r left handed. Ppl snuck into her tent. “That really ignited my PTSD.”

Has friends from all over. They are noticing she startles easily. Pets make her feel more secure.

I have been grinding my teeth 3 yrs. Lost caps, teeth getting worse. Dreams of rollercoasters, falling off cliffs. Being on top of a wave, falling.

Took 9.5 mos to get to a regular dentist. He said she needs to see a prosthedontist. Still getting bills from dentist. VA is saying “too bad.”

She is in pain. Has gained 30 lbs since pandemic.

It’s frustrating bc I keep spitting on ppl when I talk.

Working with advocate. I have call logs — I call VA over and over again. Woman laughed at me, wd not let me speak to her supervisor.

It’s been well over a year.

Now she can’t get an appt with the prosthodontist.

I am 100% disabled. President Trump passed a law so I can see whoever I want to in the community and now why can’t I?

VA does not offer nitrous gas. “I am horribly terrified of the dentist.” Saw a specialist who said she needs

“So whatever happened to ‘you can go to whoever you want’ ?”

It took me 8 mos to get these glasses. Arguing with ppl over the phone.

My hip - my VA doc, my primary care. She (my primary care doc) has done whatever she could.

“I can’t tell you how many times I’ve been on hold for hours. ‘You are number 55 in the queue.’ “

It’s hours, then b4 you can explain what’s going on, they transfer you.

I am calling 399-8020, then there is a number for Community Care. Then there are ppl who are supposed to help you get appts with outside care. Those ppl have been the rudest, the least helpful. “I’m at their mercy, and they totally make me feel that way.”

Asked the ppl on the phone how they know where to send her. They said, “Well, you know. We have lists.”

Finally the person on the phone gave her a number for a Comm’y Care provider and she got an appt in 2 days.

There is a list, TriCare or TriWest. Everyone I’ve talked to says we don’t want to be on that list. Billing not good, paperwork is lengthy. Sep paperwork for teeth cleaning and X-rays.

\*For both your hip and your dental work, you are taking on the job of finding a specialist to work with you?\*

Sort of. With dental and eyeglass thing, they send you a list. I spent hours researching the contacts for my cleaning and X-rays. But where is my list for the prosthedontist specialist?

“The ppl who really know what they’re doing don’t want to have anything to do with the VA.”

“It’s going on 2 years.”

You gave me a list for dentist, a list for eyeglasses. Where is the prosthedontist list?

They will not give her any points of contact. It’s now been a month.

\*When apply for VA health care?\*

Had a meltdown at work and lost job. Was moved from a big ofc into a closet. Worked 14h/day. Always had BC|BS and Delta Dental.

“I ended up gg to the looney bin at the VA.” I admitted myself to set an example that you can’t treat Vets that way.

She was diagnosed as 100% disabled. They said she can’t work anymore. She was confused. Looked up the rules. They don’t say outright that you can’t work but give parameters.

Was making $70K, is now making $30K.

\*Process for getting diagnosed?\*

Was diagnosed at 70% since I got back from Iraq.

Got letter after 33 days saying “You are 100% unemployable.”

When they asked me if I wanted to hurt my boss, of course I wanted to hurt him. But not kill him.

I had been there 8 yrs. Best job I ever had. I knew I cd not work there anymore. My boss was being groomed to be the owner.

“I’m trying to live with this.” Trying to do positive things with my life.

Kids are 27 (daughter) and 32 (daughter who is a midwife).

Now my kids are starting to take care of me, pay for things like getting nails done.

Younger daughter was 13 when I went to Iraq. Stepmom abused her daughter. My mental health really affected her.

\*Re: getting VA benefits:\*

Her friend told her she deserved her VA benefits and that “one day you’re gg to be forced to address that.”

I ran out of meds. Saw counselor. Counselor told her: “You realize you have PTSD, right?”

After 6 mos, counselor told me she was writing a letter to the VA so I cd get disability — told me she deserved it.

I write poetry to help me “address my inner demons.” “Pat Benetar poetry, all the way.”

For therapy, I wrote chronicles in Yahoo Groups - raw, dirty, perverted, funny. Have a lot of followers on Instagram.

I am only going to put 80% of what happened to me in my book. I got captured, I got raped. I found a way to talk about it in a real way. I don’t want you feeling sorry for me.

So many ppl told me VA wd deny me disability. 6 mos later I got 70%. I didn’t have to fight for anything. Had to give my counselor my permission.

Talking about VA benefits…

“I’ve always been this way… if there’s somebody who needs things more than me.”

“This shit that’s going on with the VA — this is the shit that’s sending me over the edge.” I cry, I crumble in bed, and as soon as it gets dark out, I start drinking.

I wrote everything down that happened to me bc I want everybody to know what really happened bc I never talked about it. I’ve been writing about it for years. I had some of my stuff in a big box that said “Don’t open till you’re 18.” Was afraid my kids wd read it when they were too young.

Bc of the VA, “I’m like a crazy woman” with my head in a pillow, screaming. “And it takes days to get over.”

“Once a week I’m putting myself thru this horrible mental abuse… But knowing that by doing nothing, nothing’s going to happen.”

Found the Federal Trade Commission under the military,

“Now I drink every other day, and I make sure that it’s dark out.”

Taking my pills makes me feel numb. I am constantly devil-angel, trying to figure things out.

“I’m angry with myself, but I’m angry with the VA bc they did this to me.”

Is now seeing a therapist who annoys her bc he’s so textbook.

I’ve had 4 throat surgeries from sand. Last surgery they snipped 1 of my vocal cords. Can’t sing anymore. “I talk like a guy.” Makes me self conscious.

“I just feel like I’m constantly being knocked down, and it’s all related to the military. It’s like the best thing that happened to me and the worst thing that happened to me.”

Felt empowered when in the military. “I used my vagina to my advantage, but it’s also be detrimental.” Talked about being in a bar with a guy saying she was beautiful and she had him drink out of her shoe. She got $250.

In the military, “I was very much in control.” “And I met a shit-ton of friends. There’s something to be said about somebody who would die for you.” I wd take a bullet for my kids or my military friends.

“I got mistreated a lot for being a female.” Men commented on her breasts. Ppl skimming her butt when they walked by.

“I’m always trying to be better.”

“I hope to God that something happens because of this [session].”

**P7B - 3pm - 12-14-2020**

Initials: TY

Monday, December 14, 3:00pm - 4:00pm

Veteran

Male

White or Caucasian

55 - 64

Some college (no degree)

Army

RI

healthcare, disability, pension – Urban

### Background (5 minutes)

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

\* Retired Army for 24 yrs

\* 100% disabled

\* Uses Providence healthcare system

\* Was Vet svc rep, medically retired - VA employee at Providence VA on pre-determination team (when claims for compensation or pension come in, I wd work those claims — Worked for outreach section just b4 retired)

\* Worked at special population clinic (homeless clinic), went to hospital 2x week. Job was to help ppl with benes, coord with hospital (bt hospital and regional office he worked at)

\* Had a business and sold it

\* From Rhode Island.

2. \*When did you leave the military?\*

June 1, 2005.

1st heard of VA benes from VFW rep at Ft Campbell, KY when he was outprocessing.

3. \*What VA benefits do you receive?\*

“Everything. Prescripts, I’ve gotten some equipment from them,” oxygen.

All the dealings with Providence regional ofc:

“They’re the best.”

“If you feel you need something that’s gg to mk your life better, ask for it.” And 90% of time the Providence VA wd get it for you.

He’s on Social Sec.

Retired from reg ofc in 2013. Then applied for SSDI.

Applied for disability at Ft Campbell when did physicals.

Applied for HC probably in 2005 when out of svc.

4. \*Do you have any family members who you claim as dependents?\*

Wife, and she is on disability comp from Soc Sec. She does not get benes from VA.

4.a. \*Do your family members receive any benefits from the VA?\*

No.

5. \*Do you manage any of your VA benefits online?\*

I don’t use the portal, eBenefits. Have user name and password, know how to get in.

5.a. \*Where do you do that? (Moderator can share screen and show MHV or VA.gov if participant seems unsure of website/account).\*

Use MHV to:

\* renew prescripts

\* Blue Button to download doc notes, MRIs, labs

6. \*Do you use any mobile apps to manage your health?\*

No.

\*How did you learn about what was available to you as it relates to health?\*

1st appt with -primary care, which was pretty helpful (the provider).

Because I had filed the claim… I was probably gg thru a C&P exam when I started using VA health care. So my info was prob available to the hospital (doc notes, etc).

Had a copy of my med records. Took my med records to my primary care, talked about what disabilities I had, what med issues I had — did this when I was retiring.

Applied for disability 1st, before health care. (?) See below.

They had a VFW rep at Ft Campbell — there was a station we cd go thru to learn abt benes, how to file claims. The rep was pretty good.

I was a wartime Veteran. I think I had my appts (health care) even before I was awarded my disability %age.

Being a wartime Veteran, I was elig for health care.

\*Familiar with priority groups?\*

Think of the number of ppl who served. Govt has to prioritize based on your income and your service. “Triage.”

I am in top priority group, so I get everything.

Over 50%, no copays. Under 50%, you may have to pay a copay.

I was married during his service. Married 3x.

\*What is it like to update your wife as a dependent?\*

“It’s simple. It’s VA form 21-686C.” Does not hurt to send VA copy of current marriage certificate. May not need it but “it’s better to have it.” Did not do it online.

Volunteered 1 day a week at hospital doing claims for DAV, Disabled American Veterans.

\*Used other VA svcs or benes?\*

“The only complaint I have on the hospital side is the dental.”

100% disabled - you are entitled to dental care. Very hard to get an appt. Also, you cd go a while without teeth. “I know guys.”

I know how to navigate the system.

Rest of health care - not hard to get appt. Used to keep a day minder. In Providence, the appts came up fast.

Have TriCare bc I’m a retiree.

\*Diff bt TriCare and VA?\*

Have Medicare. Have TriCare for life. Used both of these for 1 surgery the VA didn’t cover.

“I use the VA, total.”

TriCare

Bc I am military retiree, I cd use TriCare and pay for it. My wife is on it. I am 65 and now have Medicare, so TriCare is my secondary insurance. Can use TriCare for prescriptions but wd pay copays. Prescripts free at VA.

Wife has BC | BS with TriCare as secondary. She is still employed.

“TriCare’s only like $300 and change a year.”

\*Your outside health care - do you use anything similar to MHV?\*

No. “On MHV, you can input data on your health, I believe.” I don’t do that.

I had gastric sleeve surgery. I brought my info to my primary care and they inputted the data into the hospital system.

“I was lazy. I didn’t want to do the input.”

\*Think it wd have been the same if you put the info into the portal as if it was inputted into the system?\*

Yes, probably. “I don’t know how that wd work for the hospital folks.”

### Mental model of health at the VA

5. \*How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?\*

“I’d show ‘em the charts bc that’s what they wd understand — the money.”

Formula the “bean counters” use.

If you lose an arm and they give you 80%, you can’t count the fingers bc you already have the arm.

The Vets don’t really ask that until they get their rating. You have to explain to them how the VA came to that conclusion. It’s based on the regulation.

They might ask: “How come I only got 30% for my knee?”

I wd show them in the regulation and the table how it’s broken down, what you need to get to each % age.

6. \*In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?\*

He asked a clarifying question. Said they’re actually pretty fair. I don’t think the hospital looks at you have to be 100% for this, etc. (Later he said he does not think hospital treats you diff.)

The care that you receive, I don’t personally think the staff looks at you any differently. As far as the care itself, I don’t think there’s anything.

\*Does your disability rating impact your health care, coverage, the the types of things you can get from VA?\*

Yes. I’m 100%. Get dental.

Example: There is a clothing allowance. Can wear your slacks out from rubbing on (prosthesis, I think he’s suggesting).

Special adapted housing or autos - there are rules the govt follows.

7. \*When it comes to your health care, what is the most important thing you need from the VA\*?

“Communication. And feedback on tests and stuff like that. Because if you have an MRI or you’re being treated for something… “

Need feedback from tests.

That’s where “Healthy Vet” comes in — you have read the notes and the CAT scans. (He does this.)

My last liver test and Googled it and got nervous, misinterpreted the readings — you have to be careful about that.

## Tasks

\* \*How would you reach out to your VA care team if you had a question?\*

I would call the 273-7100 number and ask to have my primary care call me or whoever it is, if it’s one of the specialty clinics.

Someone at clinic said I can send msgs thru MHV. I have never done this.

At one time, I used to refill my prescriptions by calling that number ^ .

\* \*How would you refill a prescription you have with the VA?\*

MHV. Just go to refill prescriptions. Can refill anything that if refillable. If expired, call the 7100 number (triage number), leave msg asking doc for refill. Never even talk to the doc.

“With MHV, it’s so simple just to go in.” Tells you how many refills you have. “And they ship it right to your house.”

\*When mentioned we’d like to have him share screen:\*

“I’m a computer caveman.”

/\*Steps:\*/

\* Typed in /myhealthyvet/ in browser bar for URL.

\* Got Google results.

\* Went to MHV.

\* Signed in with MHV. “I don’t have a card or…”

\* Did forget password flow. Re: MHV: “It’s so simple to navigate.”

\* Showed us the 4 boxes. “You can compose msgs and all that stuff.”

\* Clicked on refill prescripts in box on MHV home.

\* Selected the ones he needs to refill (6-8 of them).

\* Went to page 2 of prescript list. Submitted them.

\* Went to tracking on left nav. “You can track your prescripts.”

\* Showed us self-entered meds and supplements on left nav. Went to the page. He took that info to his primary care, and they entered the info. Taking these vitamins bc of gastric surgery. VA does not have the vitamins. “I gotta kick in some money.”

A big plus of refilling prescripts - you don’t have to go to hospital and wait. You can msg your primary care if u c u r on last refill. Each doc prob has 1200 patients. They pass the info to your doc or (it goes) directly to your doc.

He used the top navigation and dropdown to look for info.

Showed us Blue Button, electronic sharing options. Can see doc notes there, and labs and tests.

I understand you can share the VA med stuff with outside primary care and vice versa.

“I use the VA HC system for everything.”

### Branding and trust (5 minutes)

3. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?\*

5, “Very satis.”

3.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

Being able to:

\* msg HC provides

\* see notes

\* see labs

\* view appts >> put them in my day minder

“Refilling the prescripts is a biggie. You don’t have to go there and wait.”

“If the Veteran can manage it, it’s a good system.”

4. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?\*

5 - definitely.

4.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

“I think it’s secure. Your personal information is secure. That’s pretty much it.”

\*Does it feel like all your info is up to date and accurate?\*

Yes, even looking at the notes. Can wait 2-3 days from appt and go in and look.

### My HealtheVet patient portal

3. \*What do you wish this website did that it doesn’t do right now?\*

“Maybe a spouse’s portal. Without the spouse having access… Even though it’s a spouse, you still have to get the approval of the Veteran…”

“If MHV could do a limited portal or if there was a way for the Veteran to give approval for somebody to be able to access their med reports, reorder their prescriptions, or do whatever they can do, it would work good for caregivers” and especially “geriatric type Veterans.”

They could compose a msg and send to doc instead of tying up the doc on the phone.

Call me if you have any other questions.

**P8B - 9am - 12-15-2020**

Initials: KW

Tuesday, December 15, 9:00am - 10:00am

Veteran

Male

White or Caucasian

45 - 54

Master’s degree

Marine Corps

TN

healthcare, disability, pension – Rural

### Background (5 minutes)

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

From KY, born and raised.

Retired 2014.

Retired Oct 2015.

“My brain and my body” wd not let me work.

Job at “the Gap”- he ended up as a supervisor of ~250 ppl (?). (Sounds like manufacturing.)

2. \*When did you leave the military?\*

Nov 2014

On retirement since Aug.

3. \*What VA benefits do you receive?\*

PTSD, anger mgmt

Some alcohol rehab - he had asked for info

Rated 100% disabled.

“I’m pretty beat up.”

Not good at listening to pain.

Lot of joint and spine issues.

Stepdaughter who is 48 yrs old and living in CA - in wheelchair her entire life.

“If I wake up 1 morning and something doesn’t hurt, I’m reaching for a pulse.”

Has seen and heard a lot of Vets say whoa is me. I am not like that. I try to be tough, forge on.

4.a. \*Do your family members receive any benefits from the VA?\*

No benefits used by stepdaughter. Wife is on his insurance for TriCare (?). But her primary is Medicare.

Has VA HC. Primary care. Pain clinic. Meds.

Sees mental health ~ once a quarter.

Providers change a lot. I go in and do what I’m supposed to do Checkups. “It’s a check in the box for the VA.” (Feels this way more so for mental health svcs.)

Had a good primary care doc for about a year. “All the good ones go somewhere else.”

Has trouble in crowds.

Has seen ppl blow themselves up.

“I try to laugh when I can. And I find that helps.”

Does not use outside health care unless the VA “farms me out.” If VA too full, the VA will farm you out to the local docs.

His neck and back fusions were not done well. Neurosurgeon in town did not want to touch it. Another doc was blunt and said there wd be a chance he wd not walk again if he treated him.

Veterans One Choice Program. They’ve take pretty good care of me.

VA is primary. Then TriCare.

Lot of his problems are psychological + has neuropathy.

5. \*Do you manage any of your VA benefits online?\*

“Everything I do is on the My Health Vet.”

\* Secure comms

\* Refills

\* Appts - mainly uses calendar, sometimes checks MHV.

There is something on there about my med records, my files. When I retired, I had 6 inches thick of medical files. Have had a lot of surgeries.

When they did my assessment in Salt Lake City, that VA did not talk to any other VA. So I had to bring all my records to this VA. But I did not have all my records. So they are not all on MHV.

\*What shows up?\*

Sometimes if I had an appt, it will be there. But it doesn’t always show all the imp parts, which is a bit disconcerting. Seeing some notes but not all. Makes me wonder if they are writing down what I told them.

\*Do anything online for disability?\*

Got denied several times from Soc Sec for disability. Their goal is to disqualify you. The woman who represented him from the govt told them he had severe physical limits. Govt said he cd sort mail.

\*Anything you need to do on reg basis for VA disability?\*

No, not really. Has checkups often. He usually schedules them b4 he leaves the ofc. Schedules things 5-6 months out.

If any issues, can call or secure msg them. “I’m never gg to call today and get an appt next week.” It’s usually 1-2 mos out.

Also uses eBenes occasionally to verify something. Mostly checking on other benes besides disability.

5.a. \*Where do you do that? (Moderator can share screen and show MHV or VA.gov if participant seems unsure of website/account).\*

MHV ^ .

6. \*Do you use any mobile apps to manage your health?\*

Not really. Not a big apps person. I have gone on MHV from my phone.

\*How 1st learn what benes avail to you?\*

Started on base with DAV, b4 he left the svc.

DAV also helped his now 96 yr old dad get into the VA last yr. (WWII Veteran). Had couple hiccups but they are not finalizing his disability check. Gave him 10% for PTSD, shell shock. Since then has had X-rays for hip, back, shoulder. And hearing test. He will prob get around 30%.

Hard to convince his dad. He always said there are ppl worse off than me.

Mom has some dementia.

I went to DAV, they submitted all my paperwork.

He learned about the VA b4 retiring. That was his job as a Sgt Major - to help ppl transition out of the military, to take care of his guys. Knew how to get started, who to point ppl towards.

\*When did you apply for disability and HC?\*

Feb 2014ish.

\*Process?\*

I didn’t go to the VA until I got here (KY). Used based svcs while on active duty.

I knew we cd submit 6 mos b4 retiring. Got looked at faster.

Found out my disability rating within a month or 2 of retiring.

When I got here, they set me up, monitored me.

Disability took a bit over 7 mos bt the time I submitted it and got my rating.

“Once they designate you as 100%, they pretty much take care of everything.”

You have to be over 30% “to get any kind of real care.”

He does not manage things online much, even with TriCare.

My memory is not as good as it was, hard time focusing sometimes.

6.a. (If yes) \*What apps do you use? What do you use them for?\*

### Mental model of health at the VA

5. \*How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?\*

‘We’re not good at saying I’m broken.” Wait till things are really bad.

Tell them to document everything and put in a claim. Turn in all med records. Have the DAV help you. They are phenomenal.

I wd tell them to “go thru the process and be honest.”

Then the VA makes you stand on your head, etc.

Retirement physical: 48 X-rays. My filings hurt I had so much radiation in me.

When he spoke to the psychiatrist, he went in tough and she broke me down. “Had me in a puddle.”

\*Advantage of applying for disability?\*

Financial part, medical care part. “To do anything away from the VA is expensive.”

“It’s a satisfying peace of mind.”

The financial part is good. His wife does not work either. He has pension, too.

He gets dental, too.

He shares what it means for their HC with Marines who are abt to retire. Whatever % they need, means something.

His dad was getting ~$156 dollars.

Even if you are OK now, doesn’t mean you won’t need help later. Need to get your info in the system so the VA can help take care of you.

I am trying to avoid needing a wheelchair b4 60.

“Ppl have been dying waiting for appts.” The current admin has done a fantastic job for the Vets.

Vietnam Vets hate the VA. It was bad back then.

\*What has chgd in last 3-4 yrs?\*

Putting the right ppl in the right places (docs), getting rid of the deadbeats.

Being able to use Veterans One Source allowed us to use more care. (MISSION Act)

He talked abt ppl on other side of desk not wanting to help. Compared that to when he was in position of power and he felt his job was to help.

6. \*In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?\*

7. \*When it comes to your health care, what is the most important thing you need from the VA\*?

I wd say meds, but I don’t like taking them. Personal care. Knowing it’s there if I need it is huge. Don’t want to do opiates.

## Tasks

\* \*How would you reach out to your VA care team if you had a question?\*

Go on MHV and do the secure msgg.

Shared screen, then:

\* Went thru many bookmarks and selected MHV.

\* Signed in with MHV.

\* Went to hp > Inbox (within box on hp) > Compose a Msg green button on top left.

\* Inbox, looking at his mail. They were not und his concern or issue wrt refills Usually we talk about prescripts or care I need. Msg goes to nurse 1sts. Slightly concerning but I und. Last couple went to doc. Usually in 3-4 hrs I get a response from nurse confirming they will work on it.

\* \*How would you refill a prescription you have with the VA?\*

\* Pharmacy - top nav

\* Refill my prescripts in dropdown

One problem with my mental health prescripts is that my primary care care can’t refill them. So sx I have to track down the intern. But they us eventually get back to me.

How check appt with PC doc?

\* Get Care in top nav

\* Appts (in dropdown)

Sx appts are not all there.

\*What is your prim method of mkg appt?\*

MHV. “Very rarely am I gg to call.”

I’ve had a few phone appts bc of COVID. Were scheduled. Cold calling wd give me nurse, same as here.

Sx can’t get doc to respond in timely manner.

I get that I can’t always be the priority.

### Branding and trust (5 minutes)

3. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?\*

4+ range.

3.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

“It’s a good tool.” Can take care of most things I’d need to. And they are fairly responsive. It’s not a phone call, but it doesn’t mk sense to call when you can’t talk to the right person anyway.

Prim use MHV for SM and pharmacy.

4. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?\*

Do you mean my trust in their response? Or security of this site?

\*Both.\*

Never had a ? About security. High 3 to low 4 range.

High 3 or 3.8 for responsiveness.

4.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

See ^ .

Most valuable thing on MHV is SM — use this most. Also pharmacy. Wd say SM bc I us tk care of some of the pharmacy stuff thru secure msg.

**P9B - 11am - 12-15-2020**

Initials: JC

Tuesday, December 15, 11:00am - 12:00pm

Veteran

Male

White or Caucasian

65 - 74

Some college (no degree)

Coast Guard

MD

healthcare, disability, housing – Rural

[ started early - missed some of the beginning ]

1972-1993 in Coast Guard.

### Background (5 minutes)

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

Has only used the VA for GI Bill.

21.5 yrs in Coast Guard.

Lives in Salisbury, MD now.

Just hiding out from COVID now. Wife is med tech in local hospital.

2 daughters - 1 is lieutenant in Public Health Svc. She is ferologist (?) and a Vet. Was at VA Tech for years. Oldest daughter is adamant about him wearing a mask. She is on the response side from the Vet side - transmission from humans to animals.

Talked abt wearing mask.

Drugs - you cd see them coming. Cd not see COVID coming.

His career was with interdiction - drug smuggling. Governor’s Island, NY. NYC. Law enforcement training team. Miss River to E Coast and Canada to Caribbean was his territory.

Lived in NC across river from big Coast Gd base. Dad was civil svc, comptroller.

Friends were being drafted. Thought of myself as a Marine more. Seemed more fun to be in a boat. Dad said if Marine he wd go to Vietnam. Joined CG.

More highs than lows in the svc. Waited to get married. Married 38 yrs.

“The military is not forgiving when it comes to your wife and kids.” More forgiving now.

“Coasties.”

In NY for 1st WTC bombing. Was coming out of WTC, out the right door for the bomb having gone off in garage. Had dress uniform on.

He had another 2 yrs in CG. Was 42 at the time.

Put in his papers and retired effective June 1, 1993.

2. \*When did you leave the military?\*

1993 - went to work as police officer after that.

3. \*What VA benefits do you receive?\*

“It was kind of banged into us” that we cd get VA benes when retire.

Back in 1993, other svcs told you what benes u wd get if you retired. CG was harsh - if you retire, to H@35 with ya.

~1996-1997 - VA closed in MD (Salisbury?).

MD was weird state. If I hadn’t retired and had 15 yrs with military, cd get up to 5 yrs of military time added to my retirement. But he had retired earlier.

Kind of forced to retire in 2017.

Other states he called did not have weird rules around retirement.

VA was same way - you can’t just walk in, you mk appt. Told him to go to web page.

He was never routed anywhere. Told him he made too much $, was in level 4 or something. He got angry.

Everything I’ve done is from State of MD as far as HC or retirement.

He met Sec’y of VA at Popeye’s, who offered to buy him dinner. And participant bought him dinner. He confirmed the 5 yrs with VA, said MD is very persnickety. Told him you should be getting VA benes — income level req’d chgd in 1994. But that is gg away. Told him he thought getting rejected a yr ago was wrong.

So I reapplied and am still waiting. Have password for their web page.

When left CG, went to loc sheriff’s ofc as crime scene tech till 1998. After that, was natural resources conservation officer.

VA pays for on the job training - there were 6 of us in the academy who were Vets. The 2 minority guys got checks from VA. We did not get paid from the state for 6 weeks.

I was sergeant at the time. Asked why we were not getting paid. VA didn’t know anything about it. The 4 of us that were non-minority “sucked it up.” Military tells you to do that. Eventually we got paid.

GI Bill is gone. I got screwed in that deal. Mentioned Montgomery GI Bill. 1974? 1919? We didn’t pay anything into it. Knew ppl getting paid while in college.

I wanted to get my degree. Only 1 in my fam who doesn’t have one.

Mentioned paying into GI Bill.

GI Bill for housing.

I belong to some groups. Some guys are trying to get disability.

My knees are shot from being in boats.

“Nobody can find my health record now.” Routing slip to get copy of health record. I thought they wd send it to me.

I don’t exist in the CG. Every time I call the VA, the VA has no record of me.

Got a job with City of Salisbury as parking attendant at some point.

\*Password for VA website?\*

He could not find it.

\*Sharing screen…\*

Seems to be on laptop.

He went to:

\* Bing [missed search term]

\* VA.gov

I’ve tried to do the educ side. VA is very regimented as far as you don’t qualify, you don’t get it. I had a wife and kids, cd not take off and go to college.

\*What use this site for the most?\*

Have not been on it for several yrs. Someone he worked with tried to help him, then COVID hit. This person told him he wd prob qual for more benes.

He doesn’t believe he qualifies for anything except college.

Has health insurance thru state. State is gg to quit paying for our health benes. State employees have a lawsuit against the state.

I am a Vet. I ought to at least be able to get my prescripts.

\*Is there anything on this website you have looked at b4?\*

Looking at VA. gov hp:

\* Tried refill and track.

\* Tried Vet ID card but don’t need bc have military retirement card.

\* Got DD214 from the Coast Guard side.

\* I have gone thru educ, disability and records at one time, seeing if I cd get any of them.

When I put in my SSN, it does not recognize me.

Disability - mostly have done research, not applied. Can’t find my health records. VA is not gg to take my word for it bc they are a govt entity.

Not having health record puts you at a “serious disadvantage.”

Went to doc who was in an ofc doing VA exams. Doc tried to get him started with the VA.

No VA health care.

State of MD health care now. BC | BS and Express Scripts. Has TriCare for Life thru TriCare. Not sure what they cover bc it us gets denied.

His insurance:

\* Medicare is primary

\* BC|BS thru State of MD since 2017, with TC as 2ndary to BC|BS

Now TriCare is making active duty ppl pay. He has talked to ppl in their 40s retiring.

He worked 19 yrs for the MD state.

Wife is BC|BS, not on Medicare + his insurance thru MD. Don’t think TriCare has anything to do with her.

\*Steps to make doc appt?\*

My docs have my paperwork. Take Medicare card and all the pills I take. Tho I don’t need to do that anymore, been going so long.

Canceled eye appt and physical. Last time I went to doc in August, the nurses weren’t wearing masks.

Normally I call. They tk my Medicare. TriCare for Life pays my deductible for my appt, I think.

Normally need to see doc every 6 mos but has not had issues lately.

\*Use websites for managing other insurance?\*

PRMC - fam doc and cardiologist are under this. Have password. HealthNet.

Think the VA is “Health Vet.” Have name and password. Afraid password is really old.

\*Let’s try that (MHV).\*

He asked who employed Emily. Grad student? Think tank?

Steps he took:

\* Searched Bing for /healthevet va.gov login/

\* Confused when he got to this page.

\* Clicked on ad in right column.

\* Back to Bing search results.

\* Clicked on MHV portal link. Got weird sign in page with H1 repeated.

\* Did not recognize MHV, while on sign in screen. What is a “sign-in partner”?

\* Went to what is a sign in partner page (explanation)

\* Clicked on ID.me sign-in screen.

\* Found password for ID.me.

\* Did 2FA from his phone.

\* Confused by “authorize” screen. Assume they have my info already.

\* One register screen for MHV.

\* Want me to look for my user ID?

\*Why did you go to MHV?\*

Curiosity. To see what it does. Get an email about my health every week or prob every 3 mos.

Yes, this is valuable, given COVID.

Make it simple when you are designing things.

**P10B - 12pm - 12-15-2020**

Initials: TP

Timothy Peters

Tuesday, December 15, 12:00pm - 1:00pm

Veteran

Male

White or Caucasian

45 - 54

Some college (no degree)

Marine Corps

FL

### Background (5 minutes)

To get started, I’d like to get a little background information about you, and your experience with the VA.

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

\* Work for USPS, use their HC most of my life.

\* Disability in VA, so went ahead and care doc. For last yr, I have used them as my prim care.

\* Think I will be leaving the VA’s HC system.

\* Ankle is my disability, covered by VA for my lifetime.

Will be getting my own HC next yr, I think. Too hard to get into the VC for appts. They canceled an appt on me.

At least I still have private HC and that leaves a spot for someone else to get in.

I have a disability rating by the VA.

I also had hernia surgery outside the VA this year.

VA bills my insurance when I go to them (to VA).

\*Pay copay at VA?\*

For prescriptions not related to my ankle. Do not pay any other copay.

Served 3.5 yrs in Marine Corps. You have to serve 20 yrs to retire. I was honorably discharged in Sept 1992.

\*When learn about what u cd get thru VA?\*

I got out and bc I had a disability payment I spent 2d at VA in DC, went to appt. They said I didn’t go. Got a 10% rating. Later he got a check, did not know he was getting $. Disability severance pay.

~$6000 - about $100/mo, took 60-70 mos after he got out.

Had surgery in 1990 at Camp Lejuene while on active duty.

I must have lost all my papers - not visibility.

Started having issues with ankle. 3-4 yrs ago VA told him he needed to come see a primary care physician.

Had no issues with ankle. At USPS since 1995, had private HC. Saw no need to go to VA. Was receiving a payment every mo but didn’t go to VA.

Used VA home loan, got disability check.

\*What md u look at VA for HC?\*

Once he signed up for stuff with his ankle, he tried a VA closer to home.

Health care outside the VA is better. “I can be seen so much faster.” My primary care at the VA was setting up an appt for me to see a surgeon. After that, used my own, a surgeon outside the VA.

He got primary HC thru job at Post Office, then looked into primary care at VA close to him. “I was basically trying it for a year.”

COVID is part of the issue.

It’s not a savings for me. Think my prescriptions cost more. Got letter from VA. Says on bill you can go pay it early. We can’t fig out how to do that.

Can’t find anywhere on VA site (not the health site) how to pay.

\*How else do you know what you owe for prescripts or whatever?\*

Part of problem is can’t submit to health spending account. Letter has all kinds of phone numbers. No acct number.

No invoice number on bill nothing to link it to. We logged in as me and my account. Says you can pay at pay.gov. Said they wd send bill in Jan, mentioned file for hardship.

\*Show us how to pay bill?\*

Shared screen.

Went to www.va.gov/find…

Is this URL on the letter?

His wife was helping with this.

Steps:

\* Went to VA.gov

\* Sign in with MHV - wife has a diff sign-n option.

\* He then used ID.me. “They’re certainly not making it easy to log in.” “I don’t know how I just bounced from MHV to ID.me.” Went thru ID.me flow.

\* Went to payment history from VA hp. Wants to pay bill.

\* Looking for acct number, but knowing the VA, it cd be my Social.

\* Don’t know I can go any farther. I don’t know how to sign in like she (his wife) did.

\* He moused over top nav categories and no megamenus showed.

Went to pay.gov:

\* Homepage - looked at boxes

\* VA Medical Care Copayment

\* Now I have to call someone. Says you need acct number.

\* His wife set up account on Pay.gov.

\* He tried to sign in.

\* Saw Captcha, trying to fill in. Nothing happened.

\* Abandoned task.

\*Back to prescriptions…\*

I am paying more now for my prescripts for ankle. Talked to my prim care doc. Decided not to spend time on this. Unfortunately it is pushing me to another reason to leave the VA. Tho I will always be in for my ankle.

\*For your ankle, need to do anything?\*

Issue is arthritis. If becomes worse at some pt, I can ask the VA to reevaluate it.

\*That wd mean a chg in your disability rating?\*

Yes.

\*Anything to maintain your current rating?\*

They’ve eval it recently. I don’t have to submit stuff.

\*Disability rating -\*

Once I started getting the checks, I researched it. But I never asked to be eval or reeval.

Saw an outside ortho surgeon pretty recently. Was a VA doc thru VA primary care doc.

4. \*Do you have any family members who you claim as dependents?\*

No. Wife is not a dependent for monthly disability check.

There are certain tiers. Us under 30% and 80% and above.

Don’t know if there is a survivor benefit.

Not sure if could claim wife as dep bc of disability rating.

I’m not receiving health care in that way (for my family). Don’t know if that was ever an option.

Know a lot of retirees and their fams use TriCare.

\*You use MHV?\*

Yes.

\*Use other tools or sites to manage VA benes?\*

Don’t think so. Get something from work on Vets programs.

Also have national park pass thru this.

Mostly I use MHV for my prescription refills. Looked thru this morning doc notes — was nice to see.

\*Mobile apps?\*

Use mobile for MHV.

Seems amount of login was diff for mobile than for laptop.

Shared screen again:

\* Went back to VA.gov.

\* From VA.gov, hp, went to VA prescription refill and tracking. Mobile site looks diff.

\* Refill links went to MHV: Refill VA Prescripts pg.

Has only used MHV for refilling prescripts. Took a min to fig out. When prescript expired, it said so “instead of saying active.”

Steps:

\* Went to prescript detail page

\* Back to refill pg on left nav.

\* Read thru explanation of status on bottom of refill pg.

Looked as doc notes this morn on mobile.

Looking for doc notes:

\* Personal info - did not see it there

\* Track Health

Using left nav:

\* Health History - not what he expects to see

\* Journals

\* Looked on his phone, then tried to map it to what’s on the laptop.

\* Track health

\* Vitals + Readings

\* “Different information, really”

“It doesn’t seem to work in the same way as the mobile site.

Directed him to MHV home:

Yes, he sees this on mobile

\* Download my Data

\* VA Health summary (results) - yes this is where he was this morn.

\* Downloaded his data.

\* Looking at data - hard to see my info bc it’s in a small window.

\* Moused over “allergies,” etc.

\* The problems/results are everything I have been diagnosed with. Oct 19 - ankle.

\* “not easy to negotiate”

\* But “I am really impressed by the amount of data I can look up and see.”

\* Blue Button - looks like you can customize the info you want and they will send you a report. “I will use that,”

\*Feedback on MHV overall:\*

Use MHV for anything else?

No.

Most valuable on the site?

To refill prescriptions online. “Always a nightmare” to call the VA. “Great help” to get prescripts renewed. “Thrilled to be able to do it online.”

Harder with things not being in person.

Follow up with his doc canceled and he cd not get it scheduled over the phone. Now I am just gg to find a new doc.

\*Anything you wish this site wd do?\*

To be able to pay for copays, to tie that in. Even just link to… Wd love to be able to find out what my acct no. is instead of having to call.

### Branding and trust (5 minutes)

3. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?\*

4 out of 5

3.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

Still have a little bit of negot, bit confusing trying to get thru doc notes, how that pg works. And it’s even harder on mobile bc it’s smaller.

4. \*On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?\*

5 (said quickly)

4.a. \*What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?\*

Never had an issue with them. They are pretty serious with the security. 3-4 steps, so it certainly tells me my info is secure.

\*Security related to?\*

Sites hacked recently - seeing “your data has been compromised — pls chg acct number.”

\*Info is accurate?\*

“Very much so.”

\*Other places you manage HC?\*

Flex spending acct and Cigna, which manages my plan (NALC), managed by union at work.

\*How do those sites compare?\*

FSAFeds mobile app is better. That’s a really, really good one. Slightly better than MHV.

MHV is better than NALC (or NELC). Simpler.

\*Features MHV has that the others don’t?\*

Ease of getting around. Never been able to do prescripts online with my private insurance.

**P11 - 12pm - 12-15-2020**

Missed this one.

**P1C - 9am - 12-16-2020**

Initials - LW - caregiver

Wednesday, December 16, 9:00am

- 10:00am

Veteran, Veteran’s caregiver

Female

White or Caucasian

25 - 34

Master’s degree

Army

MD

### Background (5 minutes)

Met husband yr and 1/2 after injury, so was not married.

She was in the svc at Ft. Myer, too.

She noticed him checking out and having night terrors. She realized not normal.

Recoiless rifle blast, and he was in range. Screened him but did not do checkup for TBI.

She encouraged him to get treatment. He did at Ft. Belvoir.

She only ever knew him post injury.

She was in military. Got out to become f/t caregiver and he ended up getting med retired. This was after some of his treatment went wrong.

She got out May 2017; he got out in Dec. Began caregiver 2017.

\*Her free time?\*

Diff since COVID. Used to hike with 2 dogs, go to breweries.

Video games. Getting back to renovating house. Bought fixer-upper. Live in DC near Hyattsville, U of Md.

Met July 2014, dated since Aug-Sept. After a few mos, they had the convo about his falling asleep, nightmares. Said he needed to get some help if they were gg to stay together.

Unit he was deployed with raised from red flags for her. And he told her about situations in military.

Seldon - his name. 100% disabled. Was using GI Bill until the pandemic hit. Was at comm’y college. Waiting for campus to reopen.

She also gets care thru VA: HC, disability.

\*In caregiver program?\*

She is recognized as his caregiver but is not part of caregiver program.

She applied to CG prog b4 the recent updates, couple times. Social worker told her she needs to reapply. She was denied and has been appealing at the highest level.

\*Abt applying to CG prog?\*

Disheartening. More for S than for her. He was lot angrier about it. She was hoping for formal CG training and respite care. “CG burnout is a real thing.”

Ppl looking at his med records and feels like VA is saying S is not broken enuf. Exs of things that happen with him:

\* Seizure if he can’t find something.

\* Can’t be alone in kitchen.

She is in charge of his meds.

When you apply, you have to say your Vet wd be homeless without care.

He has no short term memory, is in pain for seizing every day. No physical signs of his disability.

Also she can’t hide applying to CG (shield him from this) bc he is in the loop with his care team.

\*Benefits?\*

She is on his benes.

\*CG program - what she was looking for?\* (confirming)

Training, respite, tips, tools for CG burnout.

\*Manage his care online?\*

Med refills, corresp with his docs (SM), if he needs referrals. Manages his appts. He sees SMs but wd not act on them.

Uses MHV, has own acct.

\*How manage on MHV?\*

Sep accts since we both get the HC benes from our own svc. Have sep login. Extra passwords can be a pain.

Just hit “refill everything.”

That’s how I handle my stuff, too.

\*Use other VA sites, tools?\*

eBenes once a in a while, mostly just to get docs. Saves on Google drive. Docs like CG support apps for nonprofit groups. U have to provide proof of discharge or disability. Easy to download the base letter saying he’s 100%, PTSD, retired. DD214 - any doc to prove u r a caregiver.

Mostly on MHV.

Nonprofs und hard to get into VA’s CG program. They support.

\*Yellow Ribbon Fund at Walter Reed\*

She is a coordinator — plans health and wellness, respite events.

\*Apps?\*

Does not use them mostly bc they are individual apps for everything. Wants 1 cohesive app for everything.

\*What type of apps?\*

On mobile.va.gov. “Super exhausting that there are apps for everything.”

She puts apps in folders on her phone.

As great as some of these are, I don’t want to have a folder just for VA apps.

“It wd be so much easier if this was all in 1 application.” So I just use the browser. Sheldon wd be “super overwhelmed.”

Did a study a yr ago. She gave them similar feedback.

Sheldon has conversion disorder. Very hard for him to process all this stuff.

S waits for emails from clinic and does everything on his laptop.

\*How figure out benes?\*

Had to fig a lot out ourselves. Didn’t know CG program was a thing till out of the svc a few mos.

They went to VA clinic and she was able to nav around a couple months b4 he got fully “in” with treatment.

\*Sign-in\*

Very hard. ID.me, verify, those 4 other options, with sign in at the bottom. This stuff can get hard if u r not used to military sites. She had some exposure to this bc she was in the military.

Dual access - both of them having their own accts, logins. And she has her husband’s permission to log into his stuff. This can get tricky as a CG to manage meds, appts. It’s not like just bc u r a VA CG you get special access. U just have to hope they haven’t changed their password. Typically this is frowned upon. Stigma with providers.

Until he had really bad episode, his doc was sketchy about her using S’s acct.

Is there a sep login? Feel like parent logging into your kid’s computer. But we are working together. That way, as a CG u r able to meet your responsibilities without stepping on your spouse’s toes.

\*How wd this look?\*

Not much wd chg once I got into the acct. Just me being recognized as a 2nd user on the acct. Spouse, CG - if I have to reach out to his providers, they know it’s something I’m doing in the system, that it’s not coming from him.

He cd decide to cancel all his appts, then I wd have to reschedule them. There should be a way that I am responsible for this, and this is why I have to have access in order to manage this stuff.

\*Valuable to know who is doing with with:\*

\* SM

\* Who’s doing what

\* Prescription refill and appts

Thinks all the info there is all pretty much out in the open. No need to have diff info for CG and person who is being cared for.

Maybe the CG hp is a calendar. S and I have a shared calendar and I need to check it. I also go thru his email to check all the Zoom links are in the cal, and all appts from outside providers.

Big part of responsibility is making it to and from appts.

Appt reminders.

\*Her account separate?\*

Tricky. OK with sep. 2 diff profiles. Set up under VA sep.

Knows of other milit couples in this situation.

\*Most imp thing from VA as a CG?\*

Toss up bt timely responses with SM and making sure meds are shipped on time. Some meds are mental health.

I order them as far in advance as they let me and the meds still r not on time.

Some msgs to providers are urgent. If way for faster turnaround.

Dropdown categories are generic in SM. Way to notate that this is more timely or urgent? Tricky bc all have diff ideas of emergency. Nothing that is CG, PTSD or rel to an episode or seizure.

Don’t want to say CG rel needs - sounds like u r catering to the CGs. Providers prob will not like that. Something that notates more urgency and it’s from someone who is caring for a Vet. Med is low and need something from the pharmacy.

She has isolated CGs in places like Montana. Even more isolated with COVID. They will need this even more.

Dropdown options ltd to the providers you see. Msg goes to whole clinic or to nurse providers. “Skip the middleman” bc that is part of what takes so long. This wd help with turnaround time.

She has the direct number to his trauma person. If we can’t get hold of someone for things outside the norm - she has been on hold for 2 hours, then left msg with patient care advocate, who called back 2 weeks later. No real way to follow up on this. Not good experiences with patient care advocate.

Usually try to reach out to his providers directly when I can. They can give direct answer and be most helpful. If not, S has a social worker who is pretty helpful. Contacts that person if does not hear back from doc.

\*To sched appts:\*

Therapy is on a reg schedule, every Fri. Confirm next appt at end of each appt. Arrange changes if necessary.

If outside this situation ^ then leave msg with front desk.

\*Sched thru MHV?\*

Don’t think had option to do a lot of it online. See ads. This wd be so great. When I went to do it, it only gave you the option to sched appts in a nominal amount of the clinics. None of them were what I needed. Do know how to use scheduling tool.

\*MHV hp - what should you have access to as CG?\*

Not ringing any bells.

**P2C -11am - 12-16-2020**

Initials: RS

Wednesday, December 16 11:00am - 12:00pm

Veteran’s caregiver

Female

White or Caucasian

25 - 34

Associate’s degree / trade certificate / vocational training

Army

NY

access VA benefits for you, without the help of a caregiver - Rural

He struggled to answer some ?s, was concerned about giving the right answers. Had trouble remembering.

## Background (5 minutes)

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and the Veteran you care for? (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, work or hobbies, ask for Veteran's name to use throughout this conversation).

In 2008

Got out in 2011 - was at Ft. Drum

Afghanistan.

TBI, PTSD

Just diagnosed with Potts, rel to TBI

MRIs, neurology appts, treatment thru VA

100% disabled.

Been receiving health care.

Upstate NY

8 yrs

Was in FL and Washington state bt

Has 1 1/2 yr old and a 5 yr old

5 yr old is a “monster”

\*Other things from VA?\*

Wife is caregiver, thru CG program.

He is gg thru independent living program. They are working on things for the house to make things easier. Grab bars for shower. TBI makes him dizzy, pass out.

Indep Living Program.

\*CG prog?\*

\* HC schooling benes.

\* Stipend.

\* Support groups if she needs them.

Wife in school for bachelors in accounting.

[Em seems to think wife is getting HC - she asked him to confirm and he did but she mentioned other things for him to confirm, too.]

Wife double checks everything I do. I can see all my appts online. I do all that and she checks.

\*Sites he uses\*

eBenefits and MHV (said slowly, not sure). Has auto logins.

\*Tasks for health\*

He talks to docs. She does not. Wife mks sure it is actually happening. That he is calling and making appts. Dates.

Not sure how she checks appts.

Wife has access to MHV.

\*Dependents with VA\*

Claims 2 little ones and wife.

Know they can get Champ VA but not sure we signed them up for it. Think they can get schooling with VA.

My wife is extremely knowledgeable about this stuff. I don’t know as much.

\*Health insurance\*

Wife lost job with COVID. Went on Medicaid. Whole fam gets it bc wife is not above the income.

\*Mobile apps to manage health?\*

Used to. Broke my phone and have not put it on this phone yet.

App was not “My Health” — something my cognitive therapist recommended. App was to put down reminders for appts. Notes from docs if wife cd not be there. So he cd be more indep.

Came back from WA state, things not working out with his fam. We became homeless.

Went to prim care doc. They put me with psychiatrist, neurology. Fig out PTSD, TBI.

Got help from guy who works with homeless Vets. Not in VA.

On meds for depression and anger. His prim care was doubling as prim care and mental health care.

Lesions on brain. Some discomfort with this care. They were denying his care at VA not letting him go to outside doc. Had to get primary care to sign off on seeing outside neurologist, who he still sees (Medicaid). Watertown Neurology.

Was in physical therapy for a while.

In and out of cardiology. Neurologist keeps sending me there.

Overall I like the HC.

Get a new prim care doc every 6 mos. Docs seem to be in training, moving on. Kind of sucks.

\*How describe disability rating?\*

Ppl look at me weird when I say I am disabled. Water on lungs.

Asked for clarification.

Means u r able to get HC for rest of your life for whatever your injury is.

Can get indep living, benes for your family, too.

Rel bt disability and HC?

In what way? Do they go together? Don’t und your question.

\*Does disability % impact your HC?\*

U cd still go if no disability but u wd have to pay “regular entrance.”

You get more if you have disability. Think the HC is better if you have disability bc you can see more variety of docs.

\*Most imp thing you need from VA?\*

A kick in the a@# sometimes. Get emotional appt from my psychologist checking on me bt appts. Just voicing that they’re there for a lot of guys.

They mk you do a lot of classes when leave the military. It’s in 1 ear and out the other. Overwhelming. Then when you get out, it’s like oh, crap.

Knowing they’re there helps.

He gets notes from docs. Suicide watch. Seems he’s saying his docs monitor his notes.

Mental health doc will reach out if he has not scheduled for a while or if he misses an appt.

\*How manage tasks rel to HC\*

1. If you have ? for VA care team

Chat group. Can’t remember if it’s Healthy Vet or eBenes. Used to call Aaron (from a nonprofit) if it’s a Q I need answered right away.

I keep confusing MHV and eBenes.

2. Refill prescription

Usually call my doc, my mental health provider. He reorders them, sees if need diff dose.

3. Check date for upcoming appt with VA care team.

Online.

Went to MHV test account.

I usually do it on my phone. (He wasn’t sure it was the same as what he saw at 1st, then he confirmed it was.)

He wd go to View my appts from a box on MHV hp. Doesn’t think he has scheduled appts.

Do other things on this website?

Been to outside doc appts, looks at meds he is on: right there it is - Medication list.

It’s been a bit since I’ve looked at meds on here.

If I don’t know when an appt is… This looks like the site I see.

\*Showed eBenefits… Use?\*

No. Think we use Healthy Vet more often. Saw VA Appts link in footer under Manage Health subhead. Pretty sure this is where you can see every appt you’ve had and all the notes.

\*Showed him VA.gov\*

Don’t know if I’ve really gotten into this part of it.

\*Satisfaction with MHV?\*

Prob say a 5. Don’t have issue with site. If have issue, it’s more like the lab and tests, the docs not putting it in there.

Everything is pretty simple to find what you want.

Results of lab work. Testing kidney values bc of meds I’m on. They put the results into whatever, not the site itself.

\*Trust in MHV?\*

5 - they have all my info. No reason to say anything less than a 5.

Noticed COVID chatbot thing. “That’s pretty cool.” Clicked on it, mentioned mobile - meaning when he was on his phone he did not see the COVID alert at top of page.

\*Anything u wish MHV cd do?\*

No.

Request an increase in benes. Have not tried this. Was looking at Disability box on VA.gov.

\*Wife’s access to his account\*

Wife checks his info online. He gives her his login. She navigates it better than I do.

\*You have any questions?\*

He feels bad for having no questions - I know you’re looking for as much info as possible.

**P5C - 9am - 12-17-2020**

Initials: OA

Thursday, December 17, 9:00am - 10:00am

Veteran

Female

Black or African American

55 - 64

Master’s degree

Army

GA

access VA benefits for you, without the help of a caregiver - Urban

# Background (5 minutes)

To get started, I’d like to get a little background information about you, and your experience with the VA.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and the Veteran you care for? (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, work or hobbies, ask for Veteran’s name to use throughout this conversation).

\* National Guard - Army - joined 1987.

\* Mississippi Guard

\* Husband in Army, TX.

\* Hawaii Nat’l Guard, then Ft Lee in VA - there got a job and later became Active Guard in 2003.

\* GA - Active status for AGR (Nat’l Gd) - Ft Benning, went there 2008

\* Medically retired in Jan 2015

\* Husband retired Army Feb 2019

\* Still in GA

\* Son just finished college

4. Do you personally receive any benefits from the VA? 3.a. What VA benefits does [Veteran] receive?

She goes to VA for HC, dental, and vision. Gets disability.

Educ benefit - Also went to school online to get Masters. Then transferred rest of educ bene to son.

6. Does [Veteran] have any family members they claim as dependents?

Husband claimed son as dep; he was in military b4 she was

8. 4.a. Do those family members receive any benefits from the VA?

See ^

10. Do you manage any VA benefits online? 5.a. Where do you do that? (Moderator can share screen and show MHV or VA.gov if participant seems unsure of website/account).

On MHV:

\* If need to send provider a msg, go to “My Health Vet.”

\* Check for refills and request them.

\* Send msg if need appt.

U can get to MHV thru eBenes. I got to eBenes quite a bit. Print letter if I need it.

When son in college, used app for his GI Benefits.

\*When do you need docs?\*

Letter showing my % of disability in order to get vehicle tag. If you are 100% P&T disability, then u don’t pay taxes on car tag.

P&T - problems with limbs. 2 surgeries for rotator cuff on shoulder.

Also bone spurs, discs bulging in neck. Was stumbling.

3 knee scopes, 2 bulging discs in back and 1 is herniated.

Arthritis in knees, high cholesterol. Plantar fasciitis.

Considered “undeployable.”

VA doc did write-up for her retirement.

11. Do you use any mobile apps to manage [Veteran’s] health? 6.a. (If yes) What apps do you use? What do you use them for?

Don’t think I have any apps on my phone.

She sometimes uses tablet.

Think I went to either eBenes or My Health Vet. Think I went there when I sent my doc a msg.

# Mental model of health at the VA

1. How did you learn about the health care available to [Veteran] through the VA, and what was the process of applying for and accessing those benefits? (In follow up, confirm if participant used any online tools or resources.)

Process b4 you go out of military. They tell u what u r elig for. Have appt at VA and they tell u what u r eligible for. Went to place inside VA hospital.

\*Process of applying for disability:\*

When I came out of military I already had 90% disability.

Disability is rated according to your body part - parts can be rated diff.

Lady helped me fill out paperwork. I had to go to all these diff appt. Then they told me at an appt what my rating was.

The process increased her rating.

“Was really bothersome” - the process .We did it over the phone bc the women who helped her lived far away.

A lady who worked in same building as me referred me to the lady. Think the lady was not VA.

3. Tell me about the health care [Veteran] receives through the VA.

For back, knees, go to Stockbridge Clinic.

Go to the regular VA (the “main VA”) for eyes. Glaucoma check every ~6 mos. Eye exam and glasses - Ft. McPherson ofc.

Dental - used to go to Ft. McP. Now goes to a VA in Decatur.

Had major dental work at dental school at Ft. Gordon. Was referred.

Now I either go to Stockbridge clinic or clinic in Decatur.

They were gg to send her to the new clinic in Covington for eye exam.

Some of these places she went to while still in the military.

5. 2.a. (If they have dependents) How do you manage [Veteran’s] dependent’s health care?

5. Do you use any private medical providers outside the VA for any of [Veteran] health care needs? 3.a. (If yes) Tell me a bit about the experience of using private and VA health care.

Physical therapy - VA referred her to outside PT. Also crown broke curing COVID, they referred her to a dentist.

Otherwise I don’t go to outside providers bc I don’t have the insurance for that. VA covers when they refer her to outside.

Husband also gets HC thru VA.

7. 3.b. Do you manage [Veteran’s] private health care or insurance online?

7. Since [Veteran] first became a Veteran, has there been a change in the types of VA benefits they’ve received? 4.a. (If yes) What was the reason behind those changes?

9. How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?

Percentages, “a different scale.”

Say I have a 50% rating on my shoulder. 50% is not half of 100%. 50% may only be 30%.

They have a manual that explains the %s. Complexity.

If u have disability rating, they start paying u for ur HC.

9. In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?

“I would think so.” If you have a disability, there is certain HC u need to get from them to care for it.

Problem now with right hip. They can just make it better, make me more comfortable; they can’t cure it.

\*Video appts bc of COVID\*

Had video appt to do exercises - PT. Not that great bc I forget what they show me.

“To me, it’s a waste of time.” You can’t do anything for me physically - all you can do is talk to me.

Need physical exam to really be able to tell what’s going on.

Und why they are doing video for COVID.

\*Vaccine for COVID\*

I don’t trust it. Was developed too quick.

\*Can you get HC from VA if you don’t have disability?\*

I think you can if you’re a Vet.

Husband had to go outside VA to get his glasses bc he does not have 100% disability.

11. When it comes to [Veteran’s] health, what is the most important thing you need from the VA?

I want to get better, but in order to do that, I feel I should be seen more often than every 6 mos.

Pain meds don’t work on me - think my body is immune to it, so I don’t take them.

Got allergic reaction, went to ER, got a shot. Strawberry, kiwi, and NSAIDs.

Then they sent me Naproxen, which is an NSAID, and I had a reaction.

Sometimes you just need to see the patient.

I have regular appt every 6 mos.

I have to go in and get blood work - used to be every 3 mos bc of high cholesterol.

## Tasks

\* How would you reach out to [Veteran’s] VA care team if you had a question?

Wd go to My Health Vet and send msg. Someone besides provider gets it, then they email me or call me.

She shared her screen…

\* Looked for her favorites. Could not get to.

\* Googled myhealthvet, type ahead.

\* Signed in using MHV sign in. This option is easier. She had not saved her password.

\* On MHV hp, clicked on Messages subhead.

\* Compose a message green button on SM page.

\* Select group to send msg to.

\* Would pick medication radio button, then enter subject line and message.

I tend to use this instead of calling bc “if you call, you can be on hold forever.” I get quicker response.

\* How would you refill a prescription [Veteran] have with the VA?

Steps:

\* She was looking on the browser tabs, then clicked a tab and went back too far.

\* Google

\* MHV home

\* Pharmacy subhead

\* Refill VA Prescriptions blue box in page body

\* Med List on left nav

\* Showed us all her meds. If there are no refills left, I wd have to notify the doc. If I have refills, I can just click “refill.”

I go online whenever I need it.

\* (If applicable) How would you go about checking the date of an upcoming medical exam [Veteran] has for a disability claim? (Note: this may have been a long time ago)

\* How about an appointment for a yearly check up with [Veteran’s] VA care team?

Steps (also see below this list):

\* Appt for regular 6 mo checkups?

\* MHV home

\* View my appts link under Appts subhead

\* Showed us where her appts wd be listed. You can sched or cancel an appt — has not used this option

To set up a new appt, I always send a msg.

\* (If applicable) Or a private provider (dentist, optometrist) outside the VA?

\* How would you pay a VA health care bill, such as a copay?

Has not done this.

\* How would you request a reimbursement from the VA for traveling to [Veteran’s] health care appointments?

B4 the pandemic, they have the kiosk where u can submit for reimbursement.

I forgot one time and you can go online. But I went to clinic closest to me and they gave me paperwork, which I submitted there.

I have printed out the online form — don’t think u can fill it out online.

\* How would you update the dependents on [Veteran’s] VA benefits?

U wd have to do that thru DEERS. Not sure if you can do that online.

DEERS - she Googled it to tell us what it is. Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System. Uniformed svc members database. U fill out form and u wd have to go to military facility to get it done. Wd have to take docs to prove person is dependent.

She and husband are their own sponsors. Both were in military. If I wasn’t military, he wd be my sponsor.

# Branding and trust (5 minutes)

1. How would you describe My HealtheVet to a fellow caregiver? (Note if they mention MHV coordinators, newsletter or articles — something outside the patient portal).

“It’s really easy to use and it’s very helpful when u can’t get to the person, get your provider on the phone, this is the quickest way to get to them.” Refills, meds, appts. Site not hard to use.”

3. What about “VA health care?”

“Be patient. You gotta have patience.” Things get better with time. It’s good, though things cd be improved. I’ve gotten very good care with it.

5. On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet?

5

8. 3.a. What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?

Easy to use, quicker to do what I need to do. I just go in and select med I need and it’s mailed to me.

10. On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet?

5 - I have had no problems with it. ‘Everything I’ve used it for has been a success.”

Believe info is secure, accurate, and up to date.

12. 4.a. What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?

13. If you have a question about your MHV account or something isn’t working, what do you do?

Wd check site to see if there is an area for ?s, like FAQs. If not, wd look for contact number or email.

15. Have you ever been in touch with a My HealtheVet Coordinator?

No.

17. How does My HealtheVet compare with other online health tools you’ve used?

I don’t think I’ve ever really used other online health tools. Only thing I can think of is TriCare, which is harder to use the MHV. Confusing.

# My HealtheVet patient portal (15 minutes)

1. What do you use this website for the most?

Prob to send msgs to my provider and to refill my meds.

3. What do you find the most valuable on this website?

Contacting, getting msgs to my provider bc most of the time they contact me within a day.

5. What do you wish this website did that it doesn’t do right now?

Not that I can think of.

7. Outside of this website, are there other places you go to manage your VA health care?

U can use eBenes and pull up certain things for your health. MHV is a part of eBenes, you can go to MHV thru that but it’s easier to go straight to MHV.

eBenes has medications, think there is also a place where you can look at certain things in your medical file.

Showed us that on eBenes…

\* MHV home

\* Log out

\* Google ? eBenefits

\* eBenes home - this site can be aggravating

\* Check box for consent to monitor

\* DS Logon at bottom of screen. You have to chg your password every so often on this site.

\* Had trouble doing password.

\* Pick security image.

\* eBenes home

\* Apply tab - apply for comp, pension, housing, educ, training. Also in body of hp. Showed us areas of hp. You can chg your direct deposit. Manage health - refills, appts.

\* Clicked on refills, went to MHV FX Refill page.

\* Clicked left nav, refill prescriptions.

\* Landed on Refill VA Prescripts page - has prescripts listed just like on MHV.

**P6C - 11am - 12-17-2020**

**(wife of the following participant – and his caregiver)**

Initials: TR

Thursday, December 17, 11:00am - 12:00pm

Veteran

Female

White or Caucasian

25 - 34

Bachelor’s degree

Army

GA

caregiver to Veterans and/or their dependents accessing VA benefits - Rural

Lives in FL — this differs from the info above.

She usually uses iPad. Took a bit to get her on the Zoom.

# Background (5 minutes)

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and the Veteran you care for? (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, work or hobbies, ask for Veteran’s name to use throughout this conversation).

\* She is husband’s FT caregiver.

\* Moved from AZ to FL. “A challenge” to transfer service. Transferring so he can go to the VA in FL instead of AZ. Challenge is we are not near a VA hospital. It’s in St. Pete. Not used to the svcs here.

Needed chg - why they went to FL. Guess I should have been more specific, VA hospital — what they offer is diff from clinic.

I take care of me in the morning.

Husband’s name if Yancy.

2. When did you step into the role of a caregiver? (When did [Veteran] leave the military?)

~2014.

Yancy officially left US Marine Corps in 2008.

About moving into caregiver role…

Huge challenge at first. I didn’t envision that. As a wife, for the one you love, you move into a role that will fit your spouse’s needs.

3. Do you personally receive any benefits from the VA? 3.a. What VA benefits does [Veteran] receive?

No. What do you mean by benes? No.

Is in Caregiver Program. Whole thing is chgg now, don’t know about gg forward. Greatest experiences in AZ - we were getting to know the nurses, social workers. They made it as smooth a transition as poss.

FL is diff, state is bigger. Haven’t had negative anything. “It’s all new now, so I don’t have too much info on that as of yet.”

Husband gets disability, 100% “T&P.” Gets meds, does telehealth. Did a bit of telehealth b4 COVID but more now.

Meds, psych, GI, primary care thru VA.

Aquatherapy PT in AZ. Don’t have that in FL.

4. Does [Veteran] have any family members they claim as dependents?

Claims me as dep.

5. Do you manage any of [Veteran’s] VA benefits online?

Yes.

5.a. Where do you do that? (Moderator can share screen and show MHV or VA.gov if participant seems unsure of website/account).

“My HealtheVet.”

If I need a doc to show someone he needs benes, I wd go to eBenes.

Do anything else on eBenes?

No, basically I’m on MHV to order his meds. If you call, they are busy. Best to have a paper trail so they are on it.

They provided the iPad for all the telehealth. That was great. I heard about it from a fellow caregiver. The doc was really on it. iPad was delivered in a week or 2.

How did you request iPad?

Thru the primary care provider. Social worker called me to ask what I needed it for. She found that kind of disrespectful. Already it’s humbling to ask for things — this is for my husband’s benefit.

6. Do you use any mobile apps to manage [Veteran’s] health? 6.a. (If yes) What apps do you use? What do you use them for?

No, I don’t know of any. Only mobile app I use to manage his health is the calm app to manage his meditation. That is not thru VA.

We do a lot of guided meditation 3-4x a week. Woman who started out doing it thru Walter Reed.

Just got iPad.

# Mental model of health at the VA

1. How did you learn about the health care available to [Veteran] through the VA, and what was the process of applying for and accessing those benefits? (In follow up, confirm if participant used any online tools or resources.)

Thru Vet Center, Wounded Warrior project, fellow Veteran spouses.

Applying for disability or HC/

Thru VA - went to a center and rep helped with applications.

Completed applications on paper and some was online.

It did not take that long, perhaps 6 mos.

Did this after he left Marine Corps. He had issues while in the Marines that were not addressed. Wish I’d known what to do. Hard when you get out.

Nice to have orgs like Wounded Warriors to help you once you get out.

Challenges?

Articulating what the issue is. “My husband is a Marine, will always be a Marine.” With his training, he was taught not to talk abt these issues. Keep going, keep moving. Hard for him to articulate. Shame.

3. Do you use any private medical providers outside the VA for any of [Veteran] health care needs? 3.a. (If yes) Tell me a bit about the experience of using private and VA health care. 3.b. Do you manage [Veteran’s] private health care or insurance online?

Podiatry, gastroenterology. Did use aqua therapy in AZ. Covered by the VA. We are over 30 miles from places like the VA.

Your health care?

Thru the caregiver, through the VA. Manage it online also, especially with the pandemic.

Separate accounts?

Thru MHV? No, I don’t think we get MHV.

Manage my health care thru the doctor. Docs in town. Those docs have website kind of like MHV but not “as intricate.” The outside doc site has meds, HC notes, things like that.

Experience of nav bt mgg husband’s HC and yours?

On my side, I can talk to docs faster. They don’t have the magnitude of patients at the VA. Send msg, they get back to you in real time.

Now with pandemic, seems like faster response thru MHV. Not a lot of ppl gg in, so maybe they have chance to respond back to you.

5. How would you explain a “disability rating” to a new Veteran?

“Make sure that you’re seen. One Veteran’s disability is not going to ensure another Veteran’s disability.” It’s individual.

Get seen and if your husband is not able to articulate, then take notes and pay attention. I did not know a lot abt PTSD. Husband didn’t und what was gg on.

I didn’t und what was gg on, so the best thing was to document everything. Then take the notes to discussion with HC provider.

What does disability rating allow you to do?

If you are 100%, if you have other problems, they take care of that. I’m a little confused with that, too.

I was told not to put in any other ratings. I wd not do that. There is no amount of $ that can really compensate.

He has IBS. I was advised not to get it rated. It is in doc notes.

If you meet with caregiver coordinator and see that things like IBS are not in his rating… That’s what I’m talking about.

6. In your mind, is there a relationship between “disability” and “health care”?

I don’t und the question.

Does disability rating impact your HC?

Impact the HC you are getting? I wd say so. They look in the notes and say I don’t see that he’s rated for it. So you don’t have to answer the question over and over again. I wd say yes.

7. When it comes to [Veteran’s] health, what is the most important thing you need from the VA?

Listening and understanding - you can’t get to anything else unless you listen and understand.

Now I’d like to ask you how you manage information and tasks related to [Veteran’s] health care. For each one, talk me through the steps you’d take. If there is something that you go online to complete, I may ask you to share your screen so I can see what you would do. \*(10 minutes)\*

\*Tasks\* Moderator should prompt about device usage if participant mentions digital tools or resources.

\* How would you reach out to [Veteran’s] VA care team if you had a question?

“I can call them. Or I can go to MHV.”

Typically I call. I’m more personable. I want to talk to someone. Everything is so technology driven that it seems that personal touch is going by the wayside at times.

I can speak to the nurse for his primary care.

Have not called. Was more personable when I was in another state.

I put in for a shoulder pillow. Did this:

\* Got URL not found page.

\* MHV sign in. She had her creds filled in. Fingerprint.

\* Messages box on hp > Compose Msg

\* Showed us how to fill out fields.

Mentioned calling.

\* How would you refill a prescription [Veteran] have with the VA?

Refill link in box on MHV hp.

“I love it. I’ve been using this for a long time. It’s easy.”

Can see how many refills left. If I’m down to 2, wd call.

\* (If applicable) How would you go about checking the date of an upcoming medical exam [Veteran] has for a disability claim? (Note: this may have been a long time ago)

Went to MHV hp, clicked appts link.

Like this feature. Just wish it would link to calendar. It’s another step to put in calendar.

Telehealth appts show up here.

Has not scheduled an appt thru this site. Typically call. Saw link in box on hp.

Went to VA.gov - Schedule and view VA appts online. Lot of info, this is good. Did not know this was there. Wd use it for primary care and for psych and for GI that is outside.

His outside appts don’t show up there even if VA has auth him to be seen by outside provider.

Process of scheduling outside appts?

They call. Copy, paste, put in schedule.

Here (on MHV) I can see appts. I transfer them to iPad. I set reminders, like for an hour b4. So we are ready.

\* How would you pay a VA health care bill, such as a copay?

I don’t know. Never been asked to pay one.

\* How would you update the dependents on [Veteran’s] VA benefits?

Just call in.

I manage everything. He is not involved.

Good to have sep login for you as caregiver?

It’s working for me. They know it’s coming from me. I wd assume. In AZ they knew. My phone number is in the message.

If I get msg from VA, it hits my email, says you have a msg from here (MHV).

\* How would you make updates to [Veteran’s] health care benefits?

# Branding and trust

1. How would you describe My HealtheVet to a fellow caregiver? (Note if they mention MHV coordinators, newsletter or articles — something outside the patient portal).

“Explore, explore. Don’t be scared to explore.” Take couple days to see what’s on there. Look at pharmacy, appts. Mk sure your prim care and providers are in dropdown so you can msg them.

Did not know you cd schedule appt.

3. What about “VA health care?”

How describe VA HC to another caregiver?

I am appreciative. Experiences can be diff at diff hospitals, diff regions. I miss AZ, “miss that personal thing. They knew us.” They had a lot of things there we don’t have here.

In FL, I drive 3 hours. Too far. I’m not gg to get on a shuttle. Wd be hard if husband had an accident.

If you move, do your research as to how far away you are from care, for having everything.

5. On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very dissatisfied, and 5 being very satisfied, how satisfied are you with My HealtheVet? 3.a. What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?

5 - “So far it has not failed me.” Order meds, put up something, comm with docs. It gets the msgs to them.

Today logging in was the 1st time I got that msg.

6. On a scale from 1-5, with 1 being very low, and 5 being very high, how would you rate your trust in My HealtheVet? 4.a. What makes you rate it a [their rating]? What would make it better?

5 - I trust a lot of things until you give me a reason not to. So far it’s been working, the things I need.

“I just wish the hospital was as close to me as MHV is.”

# My HealtheVet patient portal

1. What do you use this website for the most?

Use MHV the most for refiling meds.

2. What do you find the most valuable on this website?

Most valuable thing on MHV is comm with docs.

3. What do you wish this website did that it doesn’t do right now?

No.

Happy to help with research in the future.

“I love my Veteran. I love all my Veterans. … I want to know that we are all just being heard.” Being a caregiver is a diff perspective, very diff.

**P7C - 3rd cohort - 1pm - 12-17-2020**

**(husband of the previous participant, who is his caregiver)**

Initials: YG

Thursday, December 17, 1:00pm - 2:00pm

Veteran

Female

Prefer not to answer

25 - 34

CA

access VA benefits for you and your dependents, without the help of a caregiver - Rural

He lives in FL - different than the info above.

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and the Veteran you care for? (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, work or hobbies, ask for Veteran’s name to use throughout this conversation).

\* USMC 8 years.

\* Moved to FL from AZ.

\* Lot of medication and rest now.

\* Doesn’t like FL.

\* Left USMC in 2008.

VAMC is 3h away. So we do in town medical.

\*Benefits?\*

Gets HC from VA + disability.

Distance is 1 reason go to non-VA med providers.

\*Dependents\*

Wife is only one. Is in Caregiver program.

\*Manage med care or disability online?\*

Wife does sit all online. Little bit of both (not online).

\*Tools to manage health\*

Does not use tools to manage his health.

\*What VA offers you since you left Marines\*

Other Veterans - learn from them. Seems VA doesn’t share info unless you ask.

“If you don’t know you qualify for things, you don’t know to ask.”

\*Process of applying for disability or HC?\*

In the beg, he did a lot of it. Then my wife took over.

\*HC you get thru VA\*

“It’s not — some of the docs I’ve had are not great. They talk down to you. They don’t treat you like a human being.”

Have gotten off the wall answers. Outside civilian docs I have liked a lot. If I cd continue that, I wd do that instead of gg to VA.

\*True for all types of care?\*

Not all my docs. But most. Some docs don’t care.

\*Diff bt VA in AZ and FL?\*

Yes. My psychiatrist is the only one I feel genuinely cares. Docs don’t communicate with each other. “ Seems like a lot of chaos in their system.” They can’t see each other’s notes.

Had problems like this in FL and AZ.

Residents come in and out and you have to tell them the same info over and over. Isn’t that info in the notes?

Many of the in-person appts were in AZ. See diff ppl the next week. U have to explain things again the next week or from whenever the last appt was.

COVID and 3h travel are the reasons he has not had in-person care.

\*Video or phone calls?\*

Few with psychiatrist. Only 1 with prim care, my 1st contact with her. Not too bad. But feels like she’s not listening. I have outside doc for gastro - she put in consult when I already have outside doc. Wife noticed appt. Doc did not seem to be listening.

\*How describe disability (at VA) to a new Veteran?\*

“Challenging.” Not the same across the board. “Not easy to accomplish.” You don’t have all the info and u don’t know you need certain things.

I’ve had a lot of injuries but did not claim them. Told to suck it up in the Marine Corps. Later that is bad bc it’s not documented.

\*What tell new Marine (getting out) that these benes provide you?\*

They help until you get on your feet. Long process.

“It’s not overnight. It’s at least 2-3 yrs.” Once you get in there, it gets easier — you don’t have to fill out as many docs. “You kind of know what you need and how to format it for what they are looking for.’

If you don’t have doc notes, if they can’t connect your health issue to the military (or someone from military can verify), it’ll be a dead end.

\*Process\*

Put in claim > VA says we need this > you find the info > submit claim > wait for response > get letter of approval from VA > VA adjusts everything, incl back pay

Sometimes they ask you to see someone that specializes in that. They might do a test on you or an exam.

Each claim goes to diff set of ppl even tho it’s still the VA. And they may need something diff.

“It’s not streamlined.” No matter how many times you do it. I have always had to provide something else to them. Or extra, more evidence.

\*Rel bt disability and HC from VA?\*

Not quite und the ?

\*Fact that VA approves - does that have impact on HC you get from VA?\*

Yes, it has an impact. Care is taken care of if it’s svc connected. U can see VA for other things, but you will be charged. Have copay.

I didn’t know that. VA doesn’t explain these things. “You don’t know what you don’t know.”

\*Copay bill?\*

Never got one.

Travel pay process?

They pay you mileage bt your house and VA. U provide the piece of paper from doc saying you went to the appt.

\*Get payment at travel window?\*

Used to. Now they chgd it to direct deposit. You still have to go down and give it to them (the paper).

\*For your health, the most imp thing you need from VA?\*

“Compassion.” “Empathy… treating someone like a human being.”

Wife manages all appts with VA and outside docs.

\*Ever call the VA?\*

Wife takes care of all that. Only time I have contact with VA is during the appt. Telehealth.

\*How describe VA HC?\*

“It’s hard to describe bc it’s all over the place… Everybody has a diff experience. It’s not consistent.”

“It’s more inconsistent than consistent.”

\*Things outside VA you do to manage health regularly?\*

Vet Cetner counselor he talks to mostly. Do meditation and rest.

Tracks his medication. Don’t share with provider bc they have nothing to do with it. Does not seem relevant.

\*Anything u wd like to share with provider regularly?\*

Don’t und.

\*Anything we cd do to improve comm bt u and ur VA care team?\*

Don’t know. If you talk to them in person, seems like something gets misunderstood. Hard to say what wd improve it. Don’t know where comm is broken down.

\*Feedback or things missing, need improvement?\*

Nothing comes to mind. Shared everything I wanted to share.

**P8C - 3pm - 12-17-2020**

Initials: GV

Thursday, December 17, 3:00pm - 4:00pm

Veteran

Male

White or Caucasian

65 - 74

Bachelor’s degree

Army

MI

access VA benefits for you and your dependents, without the help of a caregiver - Rural

### Background (5 minutes)

1. \*Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?\* (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, branch of military, work or hobbies).

Army

Brighton, MI

Retired

Helps restore and show Vietnam helicopters at Veteran events

Snowbird - FL for Jan-Feb

2. \*When did you leave the military?\*

Left Army 1972.

3. \*What VA benefits do you receive?\*

Primary care facility. “Old guy stuff.” Bit of kidney stone problem, slightly elevated BP, sleep apnea, glasses.

50% disability.

Pilots need medical certificate to keep license. He coordinates VA care semi-annually.

Need Airman’s Med Certificate once a year. FAA, another fed agency, wants all the info they can get their hands on.

He sends electronically or puts on CD to submit it to flight physician, who downloads it.

Believe I just go onto “My Health Vet” and pull the records down from there.

I can typically get them to download it for me. As a fallback, I download it and take to flight physician on CD or memory stick.

Prob cd be easier, but it’s not a big deal for once a year.

4. \*Do you have any family members who you claim as dependents?\*

No.

5. \*Do you manage any of your VA benefits online?\*

Sched an appt — need to try to do that more often. Imp to get flight medical by end of March, I can’t fly.

Dep on which clinic… I will try to schedule - they notify me 2 months b4. I try to make my appt 6 mos b4. More than 1/2 the time it gets cancelled or rescheduled but it’s within a short window. I still have 30 days if I do this correctly.

Have worked well:

\* Sched appt

\* Secure msg for singular appt

Calling has not worked well. Can’t talk to specialist. “Gg thru the central system is terrible. And if u miss the callback, you have to start all over again.”

With SM, they respond within 24h.

“Old farts like me” don’t like the computer.

\*Other online tools u use for VA?\*

No, but looks like I’m being forced to… Travel reimbursement - that process “is forcing me into another VA platform outside My Health Vet. I can’t find a way to electronically enter my claim for travel reimbursement.”

Frustrating. It’s only 20 mi trip to VA. “I’ve already been thru 3 diff chgs in procedure for travel reimbursement.”

\* Paper process - fill out form when u leave the appt. “Extremely simple and quick.” Understand someone needs to input all this info.

\* Kiosk - screen that came up was like the paper form. Put in your last 4 and your name. Finger or pencil/stylus. $ ends up in checking acct, whatever you set up.

I have relegated myself to just filling out the form from 5 yrs ago.

I’ll do this ^ until I figure out how to do the 1 online.

He shared screen and showed us the doc he prepared to show us for problems with travel pay.

\* Access VA hp

\* Access VA screen with many logos - MHV is there — why is it asking me bc I already logged in?

\* Next step is choice of login: ID.me, DS Logon, MHV - confusing!!! Here I have to choose DS or ID.me bc if I choose select another, it loops me back to where I started (AccessVA). If I pick MHV sign in, it loops me back to MHV.

\* If I search MHV for travel or claim form, it loops me back to Access VA hp.

He is not familiar with DS Logon or ID.me - I wd have to go thru another whole registration process.

“My point is I’m already registered under MHV, why do I care about these partners? Why isn’t it the one I already connect with?”

MHV hp -

It asks me to sign in. I should not have to sign in if I have save my password and ID creds.

\* I hit sign in.

\* Sign in screen - this is frustrating for the last year. Now I see the same ID and DS choices. And aren’t the MHV options identical?

\*Tell me why there are 2 diff MHV options.\*

“I haven’t got a clue.” Well, this is just to register (pointing to the blue box MHV option).

Sign in page:

It ought to be reversed - sign in up top. Maj of ppl coming here are your users.

“It’s redundant and I shouldn’t have to choose a partner. I’ve already chosen a partner just to register.”

This is my 3rd time I have to sign in. Why didn’t it know that?

This supports the talk about govt being too big.

I used to design computer screens. We always talked abt white spc. This has so much white space.

My 4th screen looks ID to my 1st screen.

He will send the doc after this session.

If you’re signed with a partner, why can’t they all shake hands behind the scenes? And you wd just have access to the info you signed up for. Security levels for each platform. Security matrix.

“I wd think even from a cust svc standpoint that they wd be able to access the same thing the users are looking at.”

“The fog index” - it’s high here.

This has got so much fog in it that you can’t see what you want to do.

Sign-in partner page for MHV -

These 3 (ID, DS, MHV) are same as these 3 on Access VA when I am trying to find my claim form. Maybe ID runs xyz programs shown in logo screen for Access VA. Maybe DS runs other progs.

I guess I wd only qualify for certain things here (on logo page).

Saw Veteran Travel Claim Entry - Maybe that’s it!

He kept describing the concepts of security and permissions.

## Tasks

\* \*How would you reach out to your VA care team if you had a question?\*

Def go online. “I used to try to call, but it’s just a lost cause.”

\* Went to favorites in browser.

\* MHV hp

\* Sign in

\* Signed in with MHV creds

\* MHV hp - I’m back here

\* Picked SM from top nav dropdown

\* Picked compose msg on left nav

MHV - successful, much easier than trying to call.

\*When you send a secure msg, how soon you get a response?\*

Within 3-6h get response, but might not answer my ? Occasionally get instant response. Certainly within 2d I have a resolution.

Dep on what I’m asking - prescription, post office problems. “Someone’s got their eye on it.”

I’ll give it an A, not an A+ bc always room for improvement.

Much better than call center.

If send SM, get “alert” on my email. I will at least know that a response is in the queue.

“You set up all that.” (the alert - under preferences)

\* \*How would you refill a prescription you have with the VA?\*

\* Pharmacy dropdown

\* Refill

\* White at top of pg (next to L nav) — I want to see the list at the bottom of page

Have some issues with (list) - some refills are auto, so I can’t ask for a refill.

Pointing to “I” - I’m sure there are some criteria there. Only refillable bc… See screen grab — has long msg.

Track delivery seems to be worthless. I ordered this last week and it just says tracked and has number. (Has USPS link—not sure he sees this.) I just said I want to track it .

Followed the link to USPS. It’s in pre-shipment. I don’t know that that is. “Not shipped, in process.”

Bit confusing - 7 refills remain. Ordered 1 yesterday. Moused over and got long msg. Does that mean that I’m trying to order 7 or 12 and this is only the 6th month of a 12 month prescript?

Track delivery -

Normally stuff gets here within a week or 2. Rarely it cd take a month.

Track button is kind of new. I’m wondering if they have a supply issue. They are trying to give impression they have shipped it but it’s pre-shipped.”

Pointing to a prescription - ‘If it’s stuck in traffic somewhere,” I might have to call.

\* \*How about an appointment for a yearly check up with your VA care team?\*

Steps:

\* Get care dropdown in top nav

\* View my VA Appts

\* Send secure msg

Steps to schedule:

\* Schedule or cancel appts= page on MHV

\* VA.gov page for sched or cancel

\* Scrolled, was confused

\* Back button

\* MHV sched or cancel pg - again

\* VA.gov page for sched or cancel - again. Noticed he’s on VA.gov.

\* Sign in modal

\* MHV sign in - “To me, I never signed out.” I came from MHV. “The creds should jump over, I wd think. Wait a minute!”

\* Sign in

\* Back on VA.gov sched or cancel pg

\* Reading page, scrolling

\* Seems like I’m in a loop. Something has chgd. I did this about a week ago. There was a dropdown. This is not the same screen.

\* Clicked into VAOS schedule appt flow.

\*Where does it seem like we are now?\*

I’m clued in that I’m on VA.gov, as opposed to My Health Vet. I don’t know that I can’t use this one but this doesn’t have… List of svcs has 3 things I wd use.

MHV is diff - you come in and do this first (click Find a VA location link at bottom of page in VAOS with list of svcs (primary care, sleep medicine, etc).

Here (in VAOS) they are asking what svc you want 1st, then location.

Went to map page. Noticed his home address was pre-filled. Called the map “terrible.” Look at all the hospitals in Chicago.

\*Anything on MHV you wish was there?\*

A legal issue. Really wd like history that is known and is downloadable. Went to Track health > Health history - wd be nice if all the appts are under medical events. I have filled out family history.

\*Having things bubble up from your EHR into those sections?\*

Yes. U wd probably have to upload. But that is what sign-in is for.

On Allergies and Adverse Reactions - this one has been uploaded only bc I have seen docs at diff locs. I don’t know why this is available - this is good.

“Now I have to go in every time and get a dump from the database.” Mentioned getting an alert.

“The data is there somewhere.”

**P9C - 3pm - 12-17-2020**

Initials: KTM

Friday, December 18, 9:00am - 10:00am

Veteran’s family member, Veteran’s caregiver

Female

American Indian or Alaska Native , White or Caucasian

25 - 34

Bachelor’s degree

masters.trai@gmail.com

Army

SC

caregiver to Veterans and/or their dependents accessing VA benefits - Rural

# Background

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and the Veteran you care for? (Moderator can prompt the participant: where they live, work or hobbies, ask for Veteran’s name to use throughout this conversation).

CG for disabled husband.

Hurt 2008, retired on med in 2010.

“He wanted to be a lifer” but they made him retire.

“Pulling teeth” to get his med needs taken care of. Finally at a point where we have some providers who really care.

Go thru “surgical cycles” — 5 procedures on 1 leg this yr. This yr has been a surgical cycle.

My role:

\* Meds for husband

\* Appts

\* His to and from (he can do light driving, just recently)

I am a mom and personal trainer, specialize in helping ppl with injuries.

In central SC. Been there off and on since 2011. Moved here shortly after meeting him. Couple yrs in Myrtle Beach.

Aaron Murphy is husband.

2. When did you step into the role of a caregiver? (When did [Veteran] leave the military?)

“On our first date.” He had an episode where his med took over. He fell asleep during movie, was lucid enuf to know I was there.

“I knew what I was stepping into.”

Meet in 2009, started dating 2010.

Went thru outprocessing with him. Took notes during his meetings.

Have 4 yr old now and a 1 yr old - both boys. Have female dog and female turtle.

Aaron gets from VA [got most of this]:

\* Disability

\* Person

\* MH

\* Surgery

\* Audio

\* Dental

\* Gastro

\* Dermatology

\* Pharmacy

\* PT

\* Screenings for TBI

\* Memory therapy

Has 20 providers. 3-8 appts a week. He doesn’t work. I schedule around with my biz. I work 1-2 hrs at a time, then take care of everyone, make sure they are fed.

Retirement - rated with VA, gets stipend. Gets homebound stipend.

3. Do you personally receive any benefits from the VA? 3.a. What VA benefits does [Veteran] receive?

Reapplying for me to be his paid caregiver. Just chgd process on Oct 1.

Previously you sent in app and CG coordinator wd approve or deny you in 1 call. Problem with Aaron’s file is it has been bounced around so not all providers can see all info. I use Blue Button to pull down everything.

New process is same app, then call for me, call for him, call together, nursing call, review bd, decision. 90 days to approve. Also can now include illnesses, not just svc rel injuries. His intestinal issues, fibromyalgia — all that will also be included.

What info is not showing up?

1st provider we had when we moved here was not good. That provider did not submit records as VA, had to get him to resubmit as VA provider. He did, but they are in wrong file. Now they are there, but they are not accessible — you have to search. Can’t just see in diagnosis list.

We’ve gone to med records — they say it’s all there; they can’t do much. It all goes back to this provider who entered them incorrectly — dealing with this 3.5 yrs.

Hospital records issue - now I keep binders of all records. Have 3 cases of his records. I keep PDFs of all his records so I can get to info easily. Took me 3 weeks to do that.

Can see full record from Blue Button. But his providers say they can’t see all the info. His current provider is not afraid of searching, which I really like.

He doesn’t remember his cyclic events, when he falls, etc. Current provider also asks me how it’s going, what’s happening.

2 episodes this week.

Keep log books of this day to day so we can go back and look at it. His “pocket memory.” We use it for water intake, bodily functions, if he fell, when taking meds.

1 of my jobs is to make sure he takes meds and that he is not running out. He takes 25 meds a day - some are multivitamins (they also help with pain).

\*Emails with providers?\*

I sign in to MHV, I think it’s “MHV” and do the “messaging portal.” Pretty easily - MH provider, primary care — msg those the most.

Call pharmacy, then msg to have record of it. Hard to connect primary care and pharmacy. We’ve fig out a system that tends to work.

Now there is a regulation that says they will respond within 24h. We at least hear something within a day.

Have had to use patient advocacy couple times last yr. He was kind of locked in the hospital. Hospital was trying to discharge him. All providers were lined up. Only holdup was the VA paperwork. Comm’y Care and Comm’y Health ofcs were in charge of setting up home care. They were supposed to send the auth codes to hospital. They did not. I had to call.

1st time it happened - he stayed 4 extra days in hospital. Another time he had to stay till Tues instead of Thurs. Another time he stayed an extra day.

He was being held at the hospital bc VA was not doing his part. Risk to stay in hospital bc of viral. Surgeon and staff were livid. Hospital has learned that if they are not getting anywhere with VA, they will call me.

Other tools?

Check eBenes. Have updated things in DEERS, added kids to it. Updated ID cards in DEERS.

Med is thru TriCare. eBenes again - making sure beneficiaries are up to date, both kids. Everything used to be my father-in-law; now it’s me and my boys. Mostly updating baseline paperwork - should anything happen to Aaron, what will happen to us? His health is going downhill.

Also use MHV for pharmacy, med records.

5. Do you manage any of [Veteran’s] VA benefits online? 5.a. Where do you do that? (Moderator can share screen and show MHV or VA.gov if participant seems unsure of website/account).

See above.

6. Do you use any mobile apps to manage [Veteran’s] health? 6.a. (If yes) What apps do you use? What do you use them for?

Google calendar opt in. My work calendar — I have 3 work cals logged on. Boys’ calendars. Aaron can typically see mine and his, but not my work cal. Use Google cals to manage our day to day.

I used to have all calls directed to my phone, trying to get it more into his ballpark.

Use My Chart for civilian medical. Not all goes back to VA. It’s a link in for civilian med systems.

\*Diffs bt My Chart and MHV?\*

MC is a bit more front view friendly. U can log into diff systems. Ea have own login. But I get alert. Calendar.

Last night lab work came back and I got alert. Nice to see lab results right away.

VA labs were not showing up. Too ~3 weeks to get results and we had to call. “The VA’s a little bit harder to get through.”

\*Alert in MC - seen in MHV?\*

Not that I’ve seen. MC alert pops in as a text. Doesn’t say who got labs. Typically we know who did.

The alerts are nice — it reminds you to look at them and you see it’s been processed, “you are not just waiting in the middle.”

MC is sep app — think it has a browser form, too. Has an app feel to it on the browser. Have not used browser option. App is easier to do on my phone.

U can add orgs to MC — it has orgs from all over the country.

## Tasks

\* How would you reach out to [Veteran’s] VA care team if you had a question?

Most likely go to MHV and log into the messenger. Typically do it on my phone, where I pretty much stay logged in. This is easiest way to get hold of them. Otherwise on phone 45 mins to an hour. Typically they call or email us back.

She is on laptop on Zoom, which she uses for her biz.

Have a folder just for Aaron. Used JoinMe app for his video appts.

Steps:

\* Folder > bookmark

\* MHV

\* Sign in with MHV (does not usually use this computer to log in). Sometimes Aaron chgs pwds and doesn’t tell me.

\* Get Care landing pg (from top nav?)

\* SM from top nav

\* Check inbox - have his broken out in folders for his ailments on the left nav under My Folders

\* Msg - they sent wrong shower chair - had to email them. Took from late Sept, finally got late Nov. Had to do 3 mos of trial.

Fine that it only shows a certain no of msgs at a time. Have 7 pgs. I do thru and delete. All the ones here are a “good” response, not just the generic response. “I usually try to keep them all in the same email cycle (thread). I use a sig. My husband is usually a little more abrasive with his emails. He is straight to the point. Here (in this email) we are clearing up some miscommunication. We probably annoyed the providers a bit.

He developed infectious disease after surgery - he tech has 2 providers (VA and outside) gg thru his primary. I try to get the process going smoothly.

“1 of my jobs I do is connect the dots. Who needs to talk to who, and connect the pieces that way.”

I had to call Comm’y Health to mk sure they got the referral they needed. Got in an hour.

I ran med clinics b4, which I think helps bc I can see the pieces easier.

“If his health is stalled, then our house is stalled.”

“We’re patient. We are. We just like to mk sure the pieces are moving.”

\*What’s it like to share account?\*

I used to sign it all under his name. Had a heart to heart with his primary care 2.5 yrs ago, when I started being his CG. She said, “I noticed the tone’s changed in the email.”

I work from the perspective that they’ve forgotten the original request. I try to help them remember.

Typically we work on emails together. I edit. Occasionally he sends email without telling me.

He forgets password.

“I try to close chapters as they are getting closed.”

MH provider - mostly meds. I try not to put his issues in writing. Everyone else we put in good detail.

I am on a couple Veteran support groups.